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MARGARET;

OR,

THE DISCARDED QUEEN.

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MARGARET: OR, THE DISCARDED QUEEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE MERCHANT-VESSEL.

THE incidents of our story belong to the latter period of the reign of David II, King of Scotland. This reign, which lasted thirty years, constituted perhaps one of the most disastrous epochs in Scottish history. An almost incessant series of hostilities prevailed with England; and twice were the invading armies of Edward III poured like an overwhelming torrent upon all the southern counties of Caledonia. In the year 1346 King David crossed the frontier with his army, to attack the English force which lay encamped near Durham. Then was fought the tremendous battle of Nevill's Cross, in which the Scots were defeated and King David was made prisoner, together with some of his bravest peers and most distinguished knights. Amongst these chieftains was Sir William Douglas, better known in the Scottish history of that period as the fierce Knight of Liddesdale.

King David and most of these high personages were subsequently detained prisoners in England for a period of eleven years.

During this lengthened absence and captivity of their monarch, the Scotch were governed by a Regent, the Lord High Steward. At last King Edward proposed to liberate the unfortunate David on payment of a ransom of one hundred thousand pounds—an enormous sum in those days, and equivalent to about two millions of our present currency. Scotland had for long years experienced the impoverishing effects of desolating wars; and the intelligence of so large a ransom being demanded, was received with consternation by the masses of the people. The great feudal barons divided into two parties,—one espousing the cause of the captive King and advocating the payment of the ransom, the other with equal earnestness insisting upon the continuation of the Regency until better terms could be obtained from England for the release of David. The Scottish Parliament decided in favour of the views adopted by the Royal party in opposition to those set forth by the Regent's party; and after some negotiation with the English Government, Scotland agreed to pay the ransom by instalments running over a series of ten years. King David was accordingly released from captivity in London; and he returned to his own country. But some of the barons and knights who had shared his evil fortunes after the battle of Nevill's Cross, were detained in London as hostages for the payment of the ransom by the Scottish Parliament; and amongst these was the Knight of Liddesdale.

The liberation of King David filled with dismay many of the great Scottish nobles who had voted against the payment of the ransom and had advocated an indefinite prolongation of the Regency. King David was not naturally vindictive: but still it was impossible to calculate to what extent mis-

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fortune, captivity, and suffering for the long period of eleven years might have embittered his temper, and might prompt him to persecute those who by objecting to the payment of the ransom, had virtually voted for his prolonged exile at the English metropolis. The Regent himself had little or nothing to fear on this score; for he was an upright and just man—and so far from having countenanced his self-constituted partisans, he had done all that lay in his power to disarm their opposition and to induce them to vote in favour of the King's immediate restoration. Besides, the Lord High Steward was a near relative of David; and he was likewise so generally popular that it would not have been safe for the restored Sovereign to render him the object of persecution, even if he were so inclined. But though the Regent, for all these reasons, felt himself completely safe, it was very different with the nobles who had sought to make his great name a rallying-cry in their opposition to the Royal party. Immediately, therefore, on the decision of the parliament being pronounced, and the return of the King becoming imminent, these nobles fled from their homes,—some into England, some to Ireland, and some to France. This happened in the year 1357.

Amongst the great barons who thus quitted their native country through terror of the King's probable vengeance, was the Earl of Caithness. He was a Lowland or Saxon peer, possessing large estates in the counties south of Edinburgh; and his ancestral home was the far-famed Roslin Castle. He was a widower at the time of his flight: he possessed an only child, a daughter: but he had adopted, or at least reared from their infancy a boy and girl, the two orphan children of a deceased friend. The Earl of Caithness fled with this little family, and with a few faithful retainers, to France, where he was well received by the Royal Court at Paris: for France was at war with England, and the Scotch being looked upon as the natural enemies of the Southrons, were always held in high esteem by the French nation. For nearly seven years did the Earl of Caithness reside in Paris,—during which period his daughter and the two orphans experienced all the advantages of that instruction which the superior civilization of the French even in those days was enabled to afford. But after a little while the Earl of Caithness was enabled, by the interest of powerful friends in Scotland, and by the kindly intervention of the French King, to make his peace with David II; and it was with joyful feelings that he prepared to return to his native land.

War still continued between England and France; and as the North Sea was covered with English cruisers, it was unsafe for the Earl to attempt to cross to the Scottish shore in a French ship. He accordingly determined upon proceeding to Holland and embarking at Rotterdam. Thither the nobleman, with his family and dependants, travelled by easy stages; and it was in the commencement of the month of May, of the year 1364, that the embarkation took place at the Dutch port

A merchant-vessel of large size, and affording all requisite accommodations, was about to sail for Leith; and it was in this ship that the passage was taken. But just as the anchor was about to be weighed, a boat was seen approaching from the shore; and the captain gave the order for his ship to remain at its moorings, until the boat came alongside. It was pulled by two stout rowers; and it conveyed two passengers. One was a tall man of martial dress and distinguished appearance, and who looked in every sense the stern stalwart warrior well acquainted with battle-fields. He wore a military travelling-suit; and on the breast of his tight-fitting tunic was embroidered a large red cross, indicative of the Order of Knighthood to which he belonged. His age was in reality about forty, though he looked some few years older, as his hair was slightly grizzled from its natural darkness, but evidently more from the hardships of the camp than from the influence of the hand of time; because his keen piercing dark eyes had lost none of their youthful fires—and when he spoke, the white, strongly set, and perfect rows of teeth gleamed beneath his moustache. His companion—or rather we should say his squire, or page—was about ten years younger, considerably shorter in stature, but still had a bold martial appearance. In the bottom of the boat were two large mail-trunks, or packing-cases, containing the armour and other effects belonging to the Knight and his attendant.

The boat came alongside the merchant-ship; and one of the rowers, on being hailed by the captain, requested a passage to Leith on behalf of the Knight and his squire. The captain looked embarrassed for a few moments; and then frankly answered that much as it would please him to comply with this demand, it was impossible, for that the entire cabin-accommodations had been engaged by the Earl of Caithness and his party.

"Little reck I for cabin-accommodation," said the Knight, whose voice was strong and sonorous, but very far from disagreeable, and whose manner had a mingled sternness and courtesy; "for those who have often reposed upon the battle-field, can slumber as well upon the hard deck of a ship as upon a couch of down. Besides, if I mistake not, the wind is fair and the passage will be short."

The Earl of Caithness, well versed in heraldic symbols and chivalrous distinctions, had already recognised upon the breast of this Knight the cross of the Teutonic Order, at that period the most celebrated in Europe. His lordship therefore hastened forward; and leaning over the bulwark, he said to the warrior, "Sir Knight, it is true that the entire cabin-accommodations of this vessel have been engaged by me; and I am all the more gratified at the circumstance, inasmuch as it enables me to proffer a share of those advantages to one who by the emblem he bears is entitled to every hospitality throughout Christendom."

"My lord," responded the Teutonic Knight, "I thank you for your courtesy, which I readily accept;"—and then perceiving two beautiful young ladies, accompanied by an exceedingly handsome young man, leaning over the bulwark, the warrior lifted his plumed cap to the fair ones with a noble air of politeness.

In a few moments the Knight and his attendant stood upon the deck of the ship: the mail-trunks were hauled up from the boat; and there was nothing now to delay or impede the weighing of the anchor.

The Earl and the Knight surveyed one another for a moment with the air of men who seek to gather from the looks something of the character and the disposition, so that they may measure the

terms on which their mutual demeanour is to be established under circumstances of an accidental acquaintance. The Knight beheld before him an aristocratic personage, about fifty years of age, with grey hair, somewhat inclined to corpulency, and richly apparelled in a travelling costume. Such was the Earl of Caithness. Some brief description has already been given of the Teutonic Knight: but we may add that the Earl on thus beholding him close, was struck by his commanding person—his tall stature, rising above six feet—and his majestic military bearing. His form denoted a giant's strength; but his limbs, though robust, were finely knit and set to the most perfect manly symmetry; so that there was nothing awkward nor ungainly in his appearance—but, on the contrary, a certain grace and elegance which showed that if the warrior were well accustomed to the hardships of camps and the perils of battle-fields, he was likewise acquainted with the halls where beauty shone and where the refined amenities of life prevailed.

"I have already the honour of being acquainted with your lordship's style and title," said the Knight: "permit me therefore to announce myself as Sir Casimir D'Este, a humble yet faithful member of the high and holy Teutonic Order."

The Earl bowed in courteous acknowledgment of this overture towards a better acquaintance; and he said, "You will now permit me in my turn, Sir Casimir, to present you to those who, together with myself, will be rejoiced to display all possible attention to a Knight of that distinguished Order."

Thus speaking, the Earl of Caithness conducted the warrior towards the spot where the two beautiful damsels and the handsome youth were standing.

"This, Sir Casimir," said the Earl, indicating his daughter, a sweet fair-haired young creature of seventeen, and whose beauty was of the most interesting and exquisite description,—“this is my beloved and only child, the Lady Albertina Roslin.”

Sir Casimir courteously lifted his plumed cap; while the lovely Albertina gracefully inclined her head to the majestic warrior.

"This," resumed the Earl of Caithness, indicating the other young lady—a superbly handsome, fine-grown, dark-haired damsel of about eighteen, "is one who, though bearing no kinship to my race, is nevertheless as dear to me as if she were my own child. You may know her, Sir Knight, as Margaret Fitz-Allan. And this is her brother," continued the Earl, placing his hand affectionately upon the tall handsome dark-haired young man's shoulder: "and I have every reason to be proud of having reared him from the period of his orphaned infancy. Though but twenty years of age, he won in tournament at the French Court the golden spurs of knighthood. Permit me to announce him as Sir Fleming Fitz Allan."

The Teutonic Knight had lifted his plumed cap to the handsome Margaret: but he now, with true military frankness, extended his hand to her brother Fleming,—at the same time observing, "You are full young to have buckled on the golden spurs: but there is something in your looks which conveys the assurance that you will ever prove worthy of the proud distinction you have so nobly gained."

So handsome a compliment, emanating from such a source, failed not to bring a glow of modest gratification to the remarkably handsome countenance of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan. The Earl of Caithness gazed upon the youth with as much pride as if he had been his own son; while Margaret Fitz-Allan bent upon Sir Casimir a look of fervid gratitude for the generous opinion which he had formed and ex-

pressed of her beloved brother. At the same time a carnation hue mantled upon the damask cheeks of the lovely and interesting Albertina; but with that quick feminine instinct which, artless though she were, made her at once aware that it was a tell-tale blush, she quickly averted her charming face—yet not before the keen eye of the Teutonic Knight had caught the effect thus produced upon the fair maiden by the compliment he had paid to the youthful Fleming Fitz-Allan.

"If your object in visiting Scotland, Sir Knight," said the Earl of Caithness, "be one of pleasure and recreation, and to make yourself acquainted with the manners, habits, and customs of my fellow-countrymen, it will delight me to render you my guest at Roslin Castle."

"My best thanks are your lordship's due for this proffer of hospitality," responded Sir Casimir D'Este; "and assuredly, ere I leave Scotland, I will pay my respects to your lordship at Roslin Castle. But in the first instance my business takes me to Melrose Abbey; and afterwards I shall seek an audience of the King, to whom I am charged with a confidential message from His Highness Prince De Salza, the Grand Master of the Order to which I belong."

"Melrose Abbey is at no great distance from Roslin Castle," said the Earl of Caithness; "and the castle itself is but seven miles south of Edinburgh. You will not therefore, Sir Knight, have much travelling when once you set foot upon the Scottish soil. And forasmuch as neither you, Sir Knight, nor your dependant have brought your steeds with you," continued the Earl, "you will permit me, on landing at Leith, to send an express to Roslin Castle, to procure such chargers as may be in all respects fitting for your use?"

Sir Casimir made suitable acknowledgments for this fresh proof of considerate friendship on the part of the Scottish nobleman: but he said no more in reference to the objects of his visit to the Caledonian soil.

"The Order to which you belong, Sir Knight," remarked the Earl, by way of continuing the conversation, "has of late years marvellously increased in numbers, power, and influence. Of all the religious-military Orders of Knighthood which took their rise from the Crusades, your's is now the most potent."

"The territory over which our sway extends constitutes a veritable empire," responded Sir Casimir, his somewhat pale countenance becoming slightly flushed with a glow of pride. "We can bring into the field an army of two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men: we possess sixty large cities and towns, twenty thousand villages, and fifty fortified castles."

"And the capital of the states belonging to your most noble Order," said the Earl of Caithness inquiringly, "is still Marienburg in Prussia?"

"Even so," rejoined the Knight. "It is there that Prince De Salza has his head-quarters and holds his court. Nearly the whole of Prussia is in the hands of our Order; and thus," he added proudly, "those who were originally poor wandering Knights, fighting for their bread at the same time that they fought for the Cross—then as mercenaries lending the services of their swords to any potentate who required such warlike auxiliaries—have become the lords of vast territories and are ruled by a Sovereign Prince."

"The valour of your Grand Master, his Highness Prince De Salza," observed the Scotch nobleman, "is world-renowned—and on that point there is only one opinion. But if the subject be not disagreeable, and as I am speaking merely for the sake

of obtaining information, I would add that in respect to your Sovereign's policy and character there are conflicting notions abroad in Western Europe."

"And what may these notions be, my lord?" asked the Teutonic Knight.

"Since you encourage me, Sir Casimir," replied the Earl, "I will speak with frankness. Some say that Prince De Salza is ambitious—fond of splendour and luxury—and that he seeks to emulate the pomp and ostentation maintained by the established hereditary monarchies of Europe: while, on the other hand, it is declared that the Prince bends only to the force of circumstances, and that he would fain bring back the habits and manners of the Order to their pristine simplicity."

Sir Casimir reflected for a few moments; and then he said, "So far as a humble member of the Order such as I am, may be permitted to judge of the character and policy of his Prince, I should say that the truth lies between the two opinions which your lordship has enunciated. No doubt Prince De Salza is ambitious in all matters which tend to the aggrandizement of the Order of which he is the elected head; and such ambition, as the world goes, can only be gratified at the expense and to the prejudice of neighbouring rulers and states. His Highness maintains a sufficient degree of pomp to suit his position as a Sovereign ruler, and to enable him to give due effect to the hospitalities of his palatial castle at Marienburg. But on the other hand, he discourages all those luxuries which are calculated to sow the seeds of decay in a powerful fraternity; while he rigorously punishes the smaller vices as if they were heinous crimes. I have now drawn your lordship an impartial picture of the Prince to whom my allegiance is sworn:—may I in return crave some little description of your own monarch, King David?"

"Willingly, to the utmost of my power," answered the Earl of Caithness. "But I must set out by informing you, Sir Casimir, that I have not seen King David for a period of eighteen years. Eleven years was he a prisoner in London; and for the last seven years I myself have been absent from my native country. When I beheld his Majesty eighteen years ago, he was then a young man of about two-and-twenty. He possessed a handsome person, graceful manners, and fascinating powers of conversation. His bravery has never been impeached:—in this respect he is worthy of his father, the illustrious Robert Bruce:—but of his discretion I cannot speak in the same high terms. He is skilled in martial exercises, and wields a powerful lance in the tournament: but he has not the high qualities befitting a leader in the battle-fray. Indeed his imprudence led to the destruction of the gallant Scottish army at Nevill's Cross—that fatal date from which a series of dire disasters was entailed upon poor Caledonia! He is now in his fortieth year; and report bespeaks him a noble-looking man, endowed with all courtly graces, but having profited little by the bitter experiences of the past. He is selfish, and somewhat vindictive: he is addicted to pleasure, and sets no bounds to his extravagances. I do not speak thus harshly because I myself have suffered at his hands: but in all honest sincerity do I draw this picture of Scotland's King."

Sir Casimir D'Este listened with the deepest attention; and he reflected profoundly when the Earl had finished speaking.

"Your late King, Robert Bruce," at length said the Knight, "was one of the greatest heroes that ever wielded weapon or achieved a nation's independence. He was a true patriot. May I ask, my lord, whether King David inherits any portion of

his father's chiefest virtue,—that patriotism to which I have just alluded?”

The Earl of Caithness spoke seriously, and even solemnly, as he answered, “When, eighteen years ago, King David led his army into England and met the host of Queen Philippa at Nevill's Cross, there cannot be a doubt that he was inspired by the most magnanimous feelings—a patriotic love for his country, and a strong hatred for the Southrons. But eleven years of captivity sadly changed him, warped all his better sentiments, and rendered him selfish and egotistical; so that he would rather rule in Scotland as the vassal of England, than risk or resign the sceptre which he cannot hold with an independent hand.”

After some little more conversation in this strain the Earl and the Knight temporarily separated,—the former to descend into the cabins to see how his new acquaintance could be best accommodated; while Sir Casimir himself turned to address Fleming and the young ladies. He was interested by the exquisite delicate beauty of Albertina, whose golden hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion were typical of the feminine beauty of her native land: but he was struck by the more splendid charms of the handsome Margaret, whose raven hair, large dark eyes, and somewhat brunette complexion, contrasted strongly with Albertina's style of loveliness. The latter young lady's shape was of sylphid symmetry; while that of Margaret was modelled in more voluptuous proportions. Both were tall: but grace and elegance belonged chiefly to the lady Albertina's figure—while dignity was the principal characteristic of Margaret. Indeed, the latter looked more like the great feudal baron's daughter than the retiring, bashful, and timid Albertina.

We should observe that the Teutonic Knight had first of all spoken to the ship's captain in the Dutch language: but all the other conversation which we have recorded took place in the French tongue. Presently, however, to the surprise of the two young ladies and Fleming Fitz-Allan, the Knight addressed them in very good English, though he spoke it with a strong German accent.

“You are astonished,” he said, with a slight smile: “but we members of the Teutonic Order are bound for a variety of reasons to study all the principal languages of Europe. Or rather I should say that those reasons have merged into a traditional custom, arising from the fact that before we finally settled ourselves in a country, we wandered from state to state, serving under the standard of different Kings—establishing our head-quarters at any city which pleased us or which suited our purposes. Therefore, while the Teutonic Knights led this errant life from country to country, it was absolutely necessary they should know many languages; and the custom is still preserved amongst us. Besides, we have warriors from all nations enlisting themselves under our banner; and thus it becomes comparatively easy for us to pick up various languages from amongst the members of our own Order.”

The Earl of Caithness now returned to the deck; and shortly afterwards one of his domestics announced that the evening repast was served up in the principal cabin; for it was by this time verging towards six o'clock in the evening. The ship had been under weigh nearly three hours; the mouth of the Meuse, on which river Rotterdam is situated, was reached; and the keel began to plough the waves of the German Ocean. The Knight descended with the Earl's party to the cabin, where an elegant repast was served up; and the warrior, by his courtly manners, his varied conversation, and his general demeanour, proved a most agreeable acqui-

sition to the group with whom he found himself seated.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY.

THROUGHOUT the night, and for a great portion of the ensuing day, the weather continued calm, and the wind was favourable: but towards the evening dark clouds began to show themselves about the setting sun, and the Captain's experienced eye discerned all the indications of an approaching storm. The two young ladies, as well as their female attendants, were for some time kept in ignorance of that danger the advance of which was speedily perceived by the rest of the party: but not long after the sun had gone down, the wind freshened to a degree which made the ship toss and heave upon the rising waves, so that the females began to suspect that the termination of the voyage might not be quite so favourable as the commencement.

Towards the middle of the night the wind had increased into a perfect tempest: the deeply-laden merchant-vessel plunged, rolled, and laboured amidst the billows—every timber creaked—and the terrific rattling of the cordage mingled with the other portentous sounds of the storm. The Lady Albertina, half dead with terror, was surrounded by her damsels, and sustained in the arms of her friend Margaret Fitz-Allan—who now showed that blended with the dignity of her bearing was a great natural strength of mind. The Earl of Caithness, Sir Casimir D'Esté, and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan remained upon the deck, to render their succour in whatsoever emergency might arise. The ship however did its duty well: the captain was experienced—the sailors were steady, collected, and courageous; and thus all that human skill could achieve to avert a catastrophe, was well and promptly done. Towards morning the storm abated somewhat: but as the weather still continued extremely threatening, the captain resolved to run for Newcastle, at the mouth of the Tyne. This was putting ~~into~~ a port far short of the destination originally aimed at: but the Earl of Caithness was glad for the sake of the ladies and their female dependants that the land might be thus quickly reached and the perils of the sea escaped from. Finally, the Dutch ship entered the Tyne, and the passengers were all conveyed ashore; for the Teutonic Knight chose to accompany the Earl's party, rather than remain on board to be conveyed to Leith when fair weather should return.

Having rested for that day and the following night at Newcastle, our party of travellers obtained horses to take them on their journey. The ladies and their female dependants were accommodated with convenient palfrey-saddles: the Earl still wore a travelling-suit: but the Teutonic Knight and young Fitz-Allan donned their armour. The male dependants were likewise well armed; for travelling in those times was by no means so secure as it is at the present day. The party set out; and in the evening they reached the Cheviot Hills, which constitute the natural boundary between England and Scotland. They passed the night at a monastery, where they experienced a hospitable reception; and on the following day the journey was resumed. The Earl of Caithness experienced a glow of joy at again being enabled to set foot upon his native land; while Lady Albertina, Margaret, and Fleming were even perhaps still more delighted at the prospect of soon beholding the proud towers of Roslin rising before them, and of again wandering through the spacious domain which they had quitted as



children seven years back, and of which they had ever since thought with mingled regret and hopefulness.

The Scotland of the period or which we are writing, was very different from the Scotland of the present day. There were at that time no desolate moors producing naught but attractions for aristocratic sportsmen: but all the tracts which are now bleak wastes, were then covered with grand and vast forests. Then, too, the deer with which those forests abounded, furnished a nobler game for the sportsman than the grouse of the moorlands at the present day. The castles of the mighty barons and the monasteries belonging to the rich members of the Church, stood in the midst of those fine old forests which were indented by the neighbouring pasture-lands as an ocean is by its shores. And instead of, as at the present day, beholding the habitations of the peasantry few and far between, all the verges of the forest and all the meadows were thickly dotted with little cottages; for though the labourers, the shepherds, and the herdsman were all vassals, and many of them bondsmen or actual slaves, yet was their welfare most scrupulously cared for by the proud barons and the great abbots who were the lords of the soil. Every cottage stood in its own little piece of garden-ground, where vegetables were copiously cultivated and flowers tenderly reared. Instead of dreaming of clearings and evictions, the lords of the soil vied with each other in their endeavours to have their domains as thickly populated as possible, by the encouragement of well-assorted marriages amongst their peasantry, and by offering advantages to new settlers, especially from amidst the roving population of the Highlands. It is true that these countless cottages which dotted the landscapes, were rudely constructed of turf, mud-walls, and wattle-work; true likewise that the few articles of furniture which they contained were of the clumsiest and coarsest description: but still they were comfortable to the fullest extent in which comfort could be known amongst the poorer orders in that age:—and what is still more, they were the *homes* of families who could thus speak of them with the certainty that they would not be ejected thence.

All the pasture-lands were covered with flocks and herds; and the whole prospect was so smiling and fair that the poet would not then have in a wholesale way depicted Caledonia as “stern and wild.” At convenient intervals there were mills belonging to the feudal lords of the soil, and to which the peasants took their corn to be ground at a moderate fee, which was paid in the grist itself. Here and there above the verdant canopies of the forests the summits of the hunting towers were discernible—those edifices which served alike as beacons and places of refuge for the hunters who might be lost in the mazes of these vast woodlands. There were likewise brew-houses scattered here and there for the use of the peasantry, who in return for the service thus rendered them, periodically gave so many days of their own labour to brew ale for the behoof of the dwellers in the castles and the monasteries. Though but a few years prior to the date of which we are writing, all these fair scenes had been ravaged by the invading armies of England,—yet a comparatively brief interval of peace had sufficed to restore them to the smiling condition in which they were now found by the Earl of Caithness and his fellow-travellers.

Of these not the least interested in all he beheld, was Sir Casimir D’Este; and he proved a most attentive listener while the Earl of Caithness described to him whose domains they were through which they successively passed.

“Behold,” said the Earl, when towards the close of the day he pointed to a vast tract of woodland on the left hand,—“behold the grand Ettrick Forest! There are trees within those deep embowering solitudes which are the growth of ages, appearing not to belong unto time but to eternity itself. That forest was wont to form part of the domain of the celebrated Sir William Douglas, better known as the Knight of Liddesdale.”

“I have heard of him,” said Sir Casimir: “he was at one time the pride of Scottish chivalry.”

The Earl of Caithness heaved so profound a sigh that the Teutonic Knight gazed on him with mingled surprise and curiosity.

“Alas! Sir Casimir,” said the Earl, “must not the true heart deplore the bright blade which becomes tarnished—or the proud warrior’s plume which is trailed in the mire, and by the hand too of him who was wont to wear it?”

“From your lordship’s figurative illustrations,” said Sir Casimir, “I gather that the Knight of Liddesdale has disgraced himself?”

“A few words will explain the sad tale,” rejoined the Earl, “as it was the other day written to me by a noble friend in Edinburgh, while I was still in Paris. Sir William Douglas of Liddesdale was taken prisoner, together with the King, at the battle of Nevill’s Cross eighteen years ago. Seven years back the King was liberated: but the Knight of Liddesdale was detained in London as a hostage for the payment of the ransom-money. While at the English Court, Sir William Douglas was completely won over to the interests of King Edward; and through his intervention a plot was set afoot for appointing the English Duke of Clarence heir to the Scottish throne whensoever King David’s demise may take place.”

“By St. Jude!” exclaimed the Teutonic Knight, with a fervour which showed how strongly, although a foreigner, he felt interested in the topic: “was such treachery dreamt of? Why, it would have indeed been handing old Scotland over to the English yoke!”

“It is nevertheless true,” replied the Earl of Caithness, “that such foul perfidy was harboured; and with mingled shame and sorrow must I add that our King lent a willing ear to the treason. The Knight of Liddesdale was the intermediary of the negotiations carried on to this effect between Edward of England and David of Scotland. The matter, when deemed ripe and matured, was duly submitted to the Scottish Parliament—”

“And the Parliament?” demanded Sir Casimir eagerly.

“Rejected it with scorn,” answered the Earl. “The Holy Virgin be thanked,” he exclaimed in a fervid tone, “there are more true hearts than false ones in Scottish breasts!—and these isolated illustrations of perfidy are the exceptions which prove the general rule of Scottish patriotism.”

“And has not the King suffered on this account in the estimation of his people?” inquired the Teutonic Knight.

“Doubtless he has suffered,” rejoined the Earl of Caithness: “but when he perceived the temper and tone of the Parliament, he pretended that there was some mistake in the manner in which his royal message had been delivered; and thus did he seek to gloss over the fault he had committed. The Scotch people are loyal towards their King,—sometimes too loyal when their own interests are considered; and at all events they are most generously forgiving in respect to the faults of one in whose veins rolls the blood of their great liberator, the lost and lamented Bruce.”

"And what of the Knight of Liddesdale?" asked Sir Casimir.

"He has received the reward of his treacherous intents," replied the Earl, "though the treachery itself was not consummated. He has been liberated from captivity in London, notwithstanding that three yearly instalments of King David's ransom remain yet to be paid; and it is said that the false knight has been laden with riches by King Edward. Perhaps he may have already returned to Scotland: or if not, he will doubtless soon be here, peradventure to renew his intrigues and machinations in some fresh sense favourable to English interests."

"The false caittiff!" ejaculated the youthful Fitz-Allan, who had been listening with all the interest of indignation to this tale, though he was previously acquainted with it: "right glad should I be to cross weapons with that same Sir William Douglas, mighty a warrior though he be!"

Sir Casimir D'Este bent upon the enthusiastic youth that smiling look of admiration with which the hardy and experienced warrior is wont to regard the military novice who gives proof of courage and daring: for there was nothing of inflated boastfulness in young Fitz-Allan's ejaculation—it was evidently the spontaneous effluence of feeling from an indignant and magnanimous spirit.

It was about sunset when our party reached a hostelry on the outskirts of the Ettrick Forest, and some few miles distant from Melrose Abbey. It bore the sign of the Unicorn, and was famous in that district for affording good cheer and comfortable quarters to hunters, travellers, drovers, and wayfarers of all descriptions. The Teutonic Knight had already inquired whether the Earl of Caithness would not push on with his party as far as Melrose, and there claim the hospitality of the Holy Cistercian Fathers who occupied that grand monastic establishment?—but the Earl had answered that he was decided to halt at the Unicorn, inasmuch as some years ago, before he quitted Scotland, there had been a little misunderstanding between himself and Father Benedictus, the Lord Abbot of Melrose. Sir Casimir had in a few words expressed his sorrow that such should have been the case; and the party accordingly stopped at the hostelry which we have named.

At that same moment a couple of men, having the appearance of the dependants belonging to some personage of distinction, were leading away three horses from the front door to the stables; but they paused for a few moments to observe the numerous party which had just arrived. The landlord—a stout, burly, good-humoured, red-faced man, who might be taken as a living evidence of the excellence of his own good cheer—hastened forth to welcome the new-comers; and on learning that the chief of the party was the Earl of Caithness, Lord of Roslin, he expressed the most unfeigned delight. He gave the assurance that ample accommodation could be provided, and that the larder was well-stored with venison, lamb, chickens, and other good things. Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan hastened to assist the fair-haired Albertina to alight from her steed: while Sir Casimir D'Este performed a similar courtesy towards the superb, dark-haired Margaret. The attendants of the party took charge of the steeds; while the Earl, the ladies, the elder knight, and the younger one, were conducted by the landlord to the apartment where the promised meal was to be presently served up.

"You have other guests in the house besides ourselves?" said the Earl of Caithness, alluding to the three steeds which he had seen in the charge of the two dependants in front of the hostelry.

"Besides your lordship's party," responded the

landlord, "I have but one guest—that is to say, without alluding to his menials, whom your lordship saw at the door."

"And this guest—who may he be?" inquired the Earl, fancying that he beheld something peculiar in the expression of the innkeeper's countenance.

"I scarcely know, considering all the reports which have at times reached my ears," answered the landlord, in a subdued tone and with a mysterious air, "how the name of that other guest of mine ought to be mentioned—whether with honour as in former times, or whether with sorrow and shame. But after all, it is not for me, a humble individual, to pass an opinion upon the characters of great personages—especially one to whom I myself am bounden—"

"To whom are you alluding?" inquired the Earl.

"To Sir William Douglas, the Knight of Liddesdale," rejoined the landlord.

"Ah!" ejaculated Fleming Fitz-Allan, laying his hand upon his sword, while at the same time the colour flushed upon his handsome countenance: "that false knight beneath this roof!"

"Peace, Fleming! peace!" interjected the Earl sternly. "It is not for you to take up whatsoever quarrel the Scottish nation at large may have with the Knight of Liddesdale."

"No—nor to entangle yourself in a dispute beneath my roof!" cried the landlord, who was a man of independent spirit, and was resolved that he would remain master of his own establishment.

The fair Albertina had already thrown a quick deprecating look upon Fleming Fitz-Allan; and Margaret, hastening towards him, exclaimed, "My dearest brother, listen to the words of our generous friend and guardian the Earl, I entreat you!"

"My young friend," said the Teutonic Knight, now also throwing in a word, "must restrain his feelings, inasmuch as circumstances are opposed to an ebullition of them in a public establishment which ought to be looked upon as neutral ground in respect to all rancours and animosities."

Fleming Fitz-Allan glanced around him with a frank expression of countenance, exclaiming, "Fear nothing from my indiscretion—and pardon me if for a moment my demeanour should have threatened to become that of a wrangler and disturber!"

"The young gentleman has well spoken," said the landlord; "and I am satisfied with the assurance that his words have just conveyed. It is strange," he continued, "that Sir William Douglas should have returned into the neighbourhood at this precise moment; for his kinsman—"

"Ah! you mean the Earl of Douglas?" ejaculated Lord Caithness. "What of him?"

"The Earl of Douglas," continued the landlord, "has been for the last three weeks hunting in Ettrick Forest, and is now tarrying at Closeburn Tower, which is at no very great distance hence, as your lordship knows."

"On what terms are the Earl of Douglas and his cousin the Knight of Liddesdale?" inquired Lord Caithness.

"That is a question which it is impossible to answer," responded the landlord, "seeing that the Knight of Liddesdale has been absent for eighteen whole years. Ah, my lord! I can assure you he is much altered. I remember full well when the gallant army of King David passed this way on its march into England to meet an overthrow at the fatal battle of Nevill's Cross, I saw Sir William Douglas at the head of the troops of Teviotdale and Liddesdale; and a finer man never wore steel panoply or beströde war-charger. He was then but

forty years of age; and his hair was as dark as that of this young gentleman here:"—and the landlord indicated Fitz-Allan. "But the lapse of eighteen years has scattered snows on the head of the Knight of Liddesdale—his countenance is wrinkled—though I must add that his form is as upright as ever, and his eye is still keen and piercing as that of a hawk."

"And I too remember him," said the Earl of Caithness, "eighteen years ago; and at that period there was much friendship subsisting between us. I must study to avoid him during my brief sojourn here," added the Earl, half in a musing tone, and half addressing himself to those about him; "for under existing circumstances I cannot bestow the hand of friendship upon Sir William Douglas: but still I were loath to signalize by a feud or dispute the happy event of my return to my native land."

After a little more conversation the landlord retired, to hasten the repast which was already in preparation for the Earl's party; and in due time it was served up. When it was over, the Teutonic Knight rose and said, "My lord, it grieves me to separate from yourself and from the other members of your party: but the worthy Abbot Benedictus would take it ill on my side, if being in the neighbourhood of Melrose I were to choose my night's quarters elsewhere than within the walls of the Abbey. I will therefore bid you farewell—"

But at this moment Sir Casimir's speech was cut short by the opening of the door; and the landlord entered the apartment with hasty steps and a troubled countenance. Flinging his looks around, he first of all addressed himself to Margaret's brother.

"Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan," he said,—"for I have ere now learnt that you bear a knightly style and title—as indeed I might have seen by your golden spurs, had I in the first instance used my eyes—I beseech your forbearance! My lord!" he continued, now hastily turning towards the Earl of Caithness, "it is unfortunate, but I am compelled to bear this message: for Sir William Douglas, as your lordship knows, is rightful lord of the Etrick domain, and I am his tenant."

"Well, but what of the message?" demanded the Earl.

"Sir William Douglas," proceeded the landlord, "has bidden me come hither to announce that he will immediately make his appearance to pay his respects to his old friend the Earl of Caithness."

"And whom I shall still doubtless find a friend," said a voice issuing from the doorway: and immediately afterwards the Knight of Liddesdale entered the room.

The landlord had spoken truly when he said that Sir William Douglas retained that hawk-like keenness of the eye which had characterized him in former times, and which had so much enhanced the natural sternness and ferocity of countenance, which, together with his desperate deeds, had gained for him the appellation of "the Fierce Knight." Though the snows of nearly sixty winters lay upon his head, yet was his tall form upright as a dart, and his step appeared to be as firm as ever it was in his youthful days. He was clad partly in a travelling suit and partly in armour: or, in other words, he wore a portion of his martial panoply over his vestments. Thus he had on his corselet and cuishes (or thigh pieces), together with the steel plates upon his arms; and a ponderous sword was suspended to his belt. The moment he entered, Margaret hastened to her brother's side, laying her beautiful hand upon his arm as if to restrain him from any act of outrage which

his impetuous temper might prompt. Albertina shrank with her natural timidity towards her father: while the Teutonic Knight stood against the wall with folded arms and with an imperturbable expression of countenance. As for the landlord, he remained standing near the door, evidently with a sense of uneasiness in respect to the issue of the present scene.

"My lord," said the Knight of Liddesdale, advancing with extended hand towards the Earl of Caithness, "we meet after a long separation; and though the lapse of time has outwardly altered us both, yet it may scarcely have changed the sentiments of our hearts."

Full of a calm and composed dignity had the Earl of Caithness risen from his seat; and in a corresponding tone, he said, "Sir William Douglas, circumstances may have changed, and our sentiments must perforce obey their influence:"—and he accepted not the outstretched hand of the Knight of Liddesdale.

"Not to be the friend, is to be the enemy of Sir William Douglas!" exclaimed that fierce old knight: and his hand was instantaneously laid upon his sword.

"What!" said Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, now no longer able to restrain himself—and he burst away from the hold which his sister had fastened upon his arm: "you dare threaten my noble benefactor—my more than father! Draw, false knight!—draw in your own defence!"

Quick as the eye can wink, the young Fitz-Allan's weapon flashed from its sheath: but not more quickly than did the sword of the old Knight of Liddesdale leap from its scabbard. In a moment the weapons crossed: they clashed—for a few instants they played rapidly about each other, like lambent flames or metallic serpents—and then with an indescribable celerity the weapon of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan was dashed from his hand. The Knight of Liddesdale dropped his own sword, exclaiming, "I give thee thy life, rash youth!"—but instantaneously closing with his vanquished opponent, he hurled him forcibly to the ground.

"It is a salutary lesson which I have taught over-weening pride," said the stalwart old Knight of Liddesdale, as he deliberately picked up his own sword and returned it to its sheath: then bowing slightly and with a cold hauteur to the others present, he issued from the room.

All that we have just described took place, as the reader has seen, in the space of a few brief moments: though even if there had been leisure to prevent the combat, neither the Earl of Caithness nor the Teutonic Knight would have interfered; for according to all the laws of honour and of chivalry, two swords thus crossed must be left to fight out their own battle. Albertina had sunk back almost fainting upon a seat: Margaret had watched the rapid and brief engagement with an indescribable anxiety on her brother's behalf—but no word nor ejaculation had escaped her lips. She knew that for his honour's sake she dared not interpose.

Fleming had been thrown violently upon the earthen floor of the apartment; and then Margaret sprang towards him. But quickly leaping to his feet, he snatched up his sword; and with a countenance all crimsoned by mingled rage, mortification, and shame, he cried, "By heaven, there shall be a deadly revenge for this!"



CHAPTER III.

THE INJUNCTIONS.

THE landlord of the Unicorn, on hearing that vindictive threat burst from the lips of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan against Sir William Douglas of Liddesdale, exclaimed, "Fie, young Knight. It ill becomes you thus to chafe towards the stalwart old warrior who generously left you in possession of your life!"

Having thus spoken, the landlord issued from the apartment; and Fleming, recognising all the justness of the rebuke which he had received, hung down his head and said nothing. The administration of that rebuke saved the Earl of Caithness and the Teutonic Knight the painful necessity of remonstrating with Fleming upon the impropriety of expressing himself in such terms after he had been fairly worsted in an encounter which his own headstrong impetuosity had provoked. The Lady Albertina, who during the combat was half fainting with terror, now threw herself into her father's arms and burst into a flood of tears. The Earl thought that it was the pent-up excitement of a naturally timid disposition finding itself a vent: but both Fleming and Margaret comprehended the true cause—while Sir Casimir D'Este was likewise enabled to form a conjecture on the subject, inasmuch as when on board the merchant-ship his keen eye had fathomed the secret love which subsisted between the great Earl's daughter and the obscure orphan Knight Fleming Fitz-Allan.

Margaret was much distressed at the signal discomfiture experienced by her brother, and which his own rashness had provoked. The old Knight of Liddesdale had indeed shown that though age had silvered his locks and furrowed his brow, the dauntless spirit of his soul was no more impaired than the hawk-like brightness of his eye was dimmed, and that the skill with which he wielded his ponderous weapon survived as effectually as the herculean strength of his stalwart arm.

"My young friend," said the Teutonic Knight, now stepping forward and grasping the hand of Fleming Fitz-Allan, whose humiliated and discomfited appearance he sincerely pitied, "be not cast down! There is no disgrace in sustaining defeat from the sword of so tried and experienced a warrior as the sturdy old Knight of Liddesdale. On the contrary, there is an honour in having crossed weapons with him!"

"I fully appreciate the generous kindness which prompts you, Sir Casimir," said young Fitz-Allan, in a low and gloomy tone, "to address me in these encouraging terms: but there is always dishonour in defeat!"

"Speak not thus, my dear boy," said the Earl of Caithness, stepping forward and following the Teutonic Knight's example by pressing Fleming Fitz-Allan's hand: "but let those assurances, as truthful as they are well meant, which have fallen from Sir Casimir's lips, have their weight and their influence with you. Without vanity I may say of myself that I have borne arms honourably in Scotland's cause; and yet in my time have I known defeat and discomfiture. The mighty Wallace was not always victorious—the gallant Robert Bruce was not ever a conqueror—"

"True, my lord!" replied Fleming Fitz-Allan; "but they were the leaders of armies—and though their troops may have sometimes succumbed to the overpowering numbers of the Southrons, yet individually they themselves were never beaten. However," added the young Knight, his countenance

suddenly clearing up, "the day may perhaps come when I shall again cross swords with the false Knight of Liddesdale; and then——"

But he checked himself abruptly, as if he felt that what he was about to say would savour of an audacious and despicable vaunt after the signal overthrow which he had just experienced.

"Come," exclaimed the Earl of Caithness anxious to turn the conversation into another channel, "let us drink a cup to wish good speed to our friend Sir Casimir D'Este, who is about to bid us a temporary farewell."

The nobleman resumed his seat: the Lady Albertina placed herself next to her father, whose arm was fondly thrown around her; and Margaret likewise returned to her chair. Sir Casimir D'Este, leaning against the wall of the apartment, expressed his thanks for the kind wishes conveyed by the Earl's last observation: but from beneath his brows he keenly watched the features of the young Fitz-Allan. This youthful Knight had advanced towards a little side-table, on which stood his plumed casque, with the gauntlets lying by the side; and while affecting to adjust the crimson feathers of that helmet, he took up one of the gauntlets, which he thrust into the folds of the plaid scarf that was gracefully worn over his shoulder. A few moments afterwards Fleming quitted the room on some pretext; and in less than five minutes he returned. The Earl, Albertina, and Margaret did not notice the little incident connected with the gauntlet; and they therefore attached no importance to the young Knight's temporary disappearance from the room: but Sir Casimir saw it all, and comprehended the significance of the whole proceeding.

"I must now bid your lordship farewell," said Sir Casimir; "for my faithful squire Jessant has been ready with the horses in front of the tavern for the last twenty minutes. It chagrins me to part from such agreeable company: but for the reasons which I have already set forth, I must this night pay my respects to the Lord Abbot of Melrose, and sleep within the walls of that holy pile."

"But you will forget not your courteous promise, Sir Knight," said the Earl of Caithness, "to become my guest at Roslin Castle. On this pledge I count——"

"And it shall be fulfilled, my lord," answered the warrior. "Rest assured that it will give me as much pleasure to enjoy the hospitalities of Roslin as I know that it will gratify your lordship to afford them."

The hand of the Teutonic Knight was then warmly clasped in that of the Scottish nobleman; and with the courtly politeness which characterized him, he saluted the two ladies. The Earl would have gone forth to the door of the tavern to witness the departure of his new friend: but Sir Casimir would not permit him.

"Remain here, my lord," he said, "with these charming fair ones from whose agreeable society I grieve to tear myself away. Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan will doubtless show me this last act of courtesy."

"With pleasure!" exclaimed the youth: and he accordingly followed the Teutonic Knight from the room.

When they were in the passage, and beyond earshot of those whom they had left in the apartment, Sir Casimir abruptly stopped short, and said to Fitz-Allan, "You have sent your gauntlet in defiance to the Knight of Liddesdale: you have challenged him to mortal combat!"

"It is true, Sir Casimir," responded Fleming. "Circumstances have so placed me that the Knight of Liddesdale must either crown his former victory

by taking my life—or on the other hand I must wipe away in his blood the stigma of my defeat.”

“You are a gallant youth,” said Sir Casimir, in a tone of admiration. “But what answer sent the old Knight to your challenge?”

“That he will meet me to-morrow morning, an hour after sunrise, in the copse which lies between the tall mill and Closeburn Tower.”

“’Tis well!” said Sir Casimir. “But how without exciting suspicion on the part of the many persons now assembled at the hostelry, can you go forth fully armed—?”

“All this is provided for,” interjected Fleming. “My own faithful page Seton acquitted himself well of the message which I gave him. The Knight of Liddesdale and myself are to meet with hunting-spears in addition to our good swords; and we are to be dressed in our travelling-suits. Moreover, it is arranged that we go forth from the hostelry altogether unattended, neither so much as taking a single page or squire.”

“And yet there ought to be a witness to such a combat as this,” said the Teutonic Knight. “Have you aught to say, my young friend, wherefore I should not be present on the occasion?”

“All the precautions which I have suggested, and which the Knight of Liddesdale at once accepted,” answered Fleming, “were influenced by my apprehension that my noble benefactor the Earl of Caithness would take measures to prevent the combat if aught transpired to excite a suspicion on his part. And then too,” added the youth, his voice for a moment becoming slightly tremulous, “I was anxious to spare my sister—and—and—the Lady Albertina—that anxiety on my account which they could not fail to experience—”

“I understand it all full well,” said Sir Casimir. “To-morrow, at precisely an hour after sunrise, will I be in that copse which you have indicated; and I flatter myself that the Knight of Liddesdale will have no objection that a member of the Teutonic Order should enact the part of umpire and witness between you.”

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan pressed the hand of Sir Casimir D’Este: they issued forth from the hostelry; and the Teutonic warrior mounted his steed. His squire Jessant then leapt upon his own horse; and they rode at a smart pace away from the hostelry,—the landlord having already undertaken to forward on the following day to Melrose the Knight’s mail-trunks by means of a sumpter-mule.

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan returned into the apartment where he had left the Earl of Caithness, Albertina, and Margaret; and in order that he might completely avert all suspicion in respect to the combat to which he had provoked the Knight of Liddesdale for the morrow, Fleming assumed a gay and cheerful demeanour.

“Now that Sir Casimir D’Este has left us,” said the Earl of Caithness, “I have leisure and opportunity to speak a few words on a certain topic to which in his presence I dared not allude. We are once more upon the Scottish soil; and it behoves you, my dear Fleming—and you also, my dear Margaret—to listen attentively while I remind you of those injunctions which I gave a few weeks back in Paris.”

“My lord,” responded Fleming, whose countenance as well as that of Margaret had become deeply serious as the Earl went on speaking, “it is impossible that either my sister or myself can have forgotten those injunctions that were so earnestly given at the time. Oh, my lord! that day on which you revealed to us the secret of our birth—that day on which you made known to us that the name of

Fitz-Allan is a fictitious one, and that we are the scions of a family doomed—fated—perhaps held accursed in Scotland—”

“Speak not thus bitterly, Fleming!” interrupted the Earl: “the misdeeds of your grandsire cannot be visited with such terrible effect upon your innocent heads!”

“And yet, my lord,” rejoined Fleming, “we dare not assume our rightful name—we dare not demand restitution of the estates which once belonged to the family from which we are descended—”

“True, Fleming,” interjected the Earl; “because the Black Parliament in its vindictive rage passed that sweeping enactment which has hitherto shed its dark influence over your lives. But as for your being held accursed if it were known who you really are—No! no! I cannot permit you to speak in language so strong as this! If you repeat such words, I shall almost regret that I ever revealed to you the secret of your birth.”

“My dear brother,” said Margaret, “be not wayward and impetuous. His lordship conceived when he revealed to us this secret, that we had both arrived at years of discretion—”

“Yes—such was my idea,” remarked the Earl of Caithness; “and when the intelligence reached me that I was free to return to my native land, I deemed it my duty to make you both aware of your true position, as you yourselves were to accompany me to Scotland. When you were mere children, gambolling in innocent pastime on the lands of Roslin, previous to my flight to the French territory, it was needless to disturb your juvenile minds with the revelation which could only afflict you, and which in the unguardedness of childhood you might at any moment betray. But still even then I felt that the time must come when the secret ought no longer to be kept from you. You know how unpleasant a task it was for me to unfold that secret—and perhaps I should have still longer postponed its revealing, if it had not been that circumstances were about to bring you back to Scotland.”

“Your lordship’s whole conduct towards us,” said Margaret Fitz-Allan, taking the Earl’s hand and pressing it between both her own, as if it were a daughter thus seeking to prove her affection for a beloved father, “has been characterized by as much delicate considerateness as generosity and goodness! We owe you an eternal debt of gratitude—”

“If you think so, my dear girl,” interrupted the nobleman, deeply affected, “and if your brother likewise thinks so—”

“Can you doubt it, my lord?” exclaimed Fleming. “Oh! can you doubt it?”—and sinking upon his knee, he pressed the Earl’s other hand to his lips.

“No, no, my dear boy—I do not doubt it!” cried the Earl of Caithness. “Rise—resume your seat—and let me continue. I was about to say that if you both feel—as I know you do—that you owe me a debt of gratitude, you will amply repay it by following the injunctions which I gave you ere we left Paris. For remember! that same terrible decree of the Black Parliament whose blighting influence fell upon your family and has necessitated that you should both be reared under a name which belongs not to you, and under which your true identity is concealed,—remember, I say, this same decree fulminated the most severe penalties against all those who might become the friends and protectors of the scions of your race! Therefore, if by a single syllable inadvertently dropped from your lips, you were to betray this secret, the consequences would not alight merely upon your own heads, but would redound upon myself!”

"And therefore," exclaimed Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, in a tone of fervid enthusiasm, "I would sooner perish than by any act or word of mine bring sorrow upon your house, my noble—my generous benefactor!—my more than father!"

"And I solemnly echo my brother's sentiments," said Margaret, in a tone of deepest earnestness.

The Lady Albertina had hitherto remained silent throughout this discourse, though she was deeply interested in it: but now with tears in her eyes, she exclaimed, "Oh, my dear father! I would pledge my very existence for the love and duty which both Fleming and Margaret entertain towards you, and for the full sincerity with which they have just spoken!"

"I know it, my dear child—I know it all!" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness: "but the matter is of an importance which rendered it needful for me to repeat the injunctions that I had before so earnestly given ere we set out from Paris on our return to our native land. But now enough upon the topic!—we will touch on it no more! To-morrow, my dear children," continued the Earl, his countenance becoming animated with joy and delight, "we shall again behold the noble towers of Roslin—we shall tread once more in the halls of my ancestors—we shall revisit each familiar spot and each much-loved scene! Is there not happiness for us in this prospect?"

"Oh, a happiness unspeakable!" exclaimed Fleming Fitz-Allan, with a forced enthusiasm; for the thought struck cold within him that he might never again behold the towers of Roslin—never revisit those familiar spots,—but that the morrow's morn might see him stretched a bleeding corpse upon the ground—for ever separated by death from his fond sister, his generous benefactor, and from that charming Albertina whom he loved with all the devotion of his fervid impassioned soul!

Yet there was nothing of cowardice in the cause of these reflections which swept rapidly through the brain of young Fitz-Allan: it was merely the natural recoiling for a moment of the youthful heart from the idea of being possibly snatched away from all he loved and held dear on earth. The feeling of weakness, if such it can be called, was transient; and it was neither perceived nor suspected by the others present.

They soon after separated to their respective chambers; and when Fleming had sought his own room, he found his faithful page Seton awaiting him. This was a comely youth about his master's own age—namely twenty; and to Fitz-Allan he was devotedly attached. The preparations for the following morning were duly made—Fleming's last instructions were given to the page—and they separated. Our young hero then retired to the humble but comfortable pallet which was provided for him; and in a short time he slept soundly, the image of the beautiful Albertina appearing to him with bashful smiles in his dreams.

A little before sunrise young Seton crept up to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan's chamber; and he found his master had just awakened. The youthful Knight's toilet was speedily achieved; and he descended to the yard at the back of the hostelry, where the stables were situated. Seton had already caparisoned our hero's steed—the animal was led forth—and Fleming sprang into the saddle. In those times there was always a good supply of boarspears kept at the hostelries in the districts frequented by hunters; and thus Seton had been enabled to procure one of these weapons for the use of his master.

"And now, Sir Knight," inquired the young page, who deemed it suitable and becoming to

maintain a firm demeanour, although he was really full of anxiety and alarm on his beloved master's account, "is there aught else that I can do?—are there no last instructions which you have to give?"

"Nothing, Seton," replied our hero. "I have already told you everything. If I fall in this combat, you will assure the Earl that it was in obedience to the sternest sense of honour that I provoked it; and though he may mourn for me, he will not have to deplore that his benevolent hand has fostered a recreant and a coward. As for my sister, Seton, tell her how fondly I have loved her—tell her that I could not brook the smarting disgrace inflicted upon me last evening—tell her likewise that it were better she should weep for my loss as that of a brave man, than that she should see me live on with the stigma of defeat and overthrow fastened upon me!"

"I will forget nothing of what you tell me, Sir Fleming—my beloved young master!" exclaimed the page, who was scarcely able even by the greatest effort to subdue an outburst of emotion.

"But think not, my dear Seton," continued Fitz-Allan, now speaking cheerfully, while a glow animated his remarkably handsome countenance,— "think not because I tell you all these things, I entertain any craven apprehension for the result of the combat. No, no! I am not disheartened by the defeat of last evening; nor do I regard it as a presage of ill-fortune for this morning. But enough! Farewell, Seton! I trust in heaven that in a short time you will see me return!"

The page wrung his master's outstretched hand; and then turning abruptly away, plunged into the hostelry to conceal the tears which were now flowing down his cheeks. Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan rode off at a rapid pace; and a few minutes afterwards the stalwart old Knight of Liddesdale likewise sallied forth on horseback from the premises. He obtained a glimpse of his youthful antagonist's retreating form, as Fleming cantered across the meadows; and Sir William Douglas took another route, so as to avert suspicion as to what was really pending, in case there should be any curious eyes peeping from the windows. But the hostelry was all quiet; and no one except the confidential pages of the two Knights, entertained the slightest suspicion of what was going forward.

"He is a brave and chivalrous youth," said the old Knight of Liddesdale to himself; "and right sorry am I for him that he has provoked this second encounter. Yet I will not take his life! I will content myself with inflicting upon him such chastisement as may make him remember until the end of his days how he dared encounter the wrath of Sir William Douglas!"

Meanwhile Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan was continuing his way across the meadows. The copse which had been named as the place of appointment, was about three miles distant: the tall mill which has likewise been alluded to, was two miles from the hostelry; and Clossburn Tower, the other point of which mention has been made, was about a mile beyond the copse. Between the hostelry and the copse stretched the broad meadows covered with flocks and herds, and dotted by the peasants' cottages. As our young hero rode along, with his sword by his side and his hunting-spear in his hand, he attracted the admiring notice of many a young lass peeping forth from the hut-window, or out betimes for the milking of the cows. And no wonder that Fitz-Allan should thus attract attention: for as we have already said, he possessed a countenance of exceeding masculine beauty—while his figure, though slender, was well knit and modelled to the most admirable proportions. His long dark wavy hair was as luxuriant

as that of a woman. He was as yet beardless, but with a rich down on the lower part of his countenance where the beard might soon be. His features were of the Grecian style; his nose was perfectly straight; his upper lip was short—and in its curve gave a slightly haughty expression to his features. His teeth were white as ivory and faultlessly even. Altogether he was as interesting a young gallant as could possibly be seen; and the mingled dauntlessness and impetuosity of his character, as well as the loftiness of his spirit, could be read in the flashings of his fine dark eyes.

"No!" he said to himself, pursuing the train of thought which was occupying him at the moment that he parted from young Seton, "I have no craven apprehension as to the result of this combat! But I must be cool: for last evening it was my fiery indignation which blinded me—it was my impetuosity that laid me open to be foiled by that sudden trick of fence which the old Knight of Liddesdale put forth. At all events I shall not disgrace these golden spurs which I wear upon my heels! Did I not, in that grand joust at Versailles, dismount three gallant young French gentlemen one after another? And then, when the King of France bade me kneel down that the golden spurs might be buckled to my feet, and that his own royal sword should administer the *accolade* of chivalry,—did I not, when rising a belted knight, take my place with the array of other knights in that grand tournament?—and did not my lance unseat the haughty and gallant Sir Gilles de Vericourt at the first tilt? Oh, yes!—and therefore now let me again do honour to these golden spurs which I won on that memorable day!"

It was thus that Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan gave the rein to his reflections, which became all the more enthusiastic as his spirits rose beneath the exhilarating influence of the morning air's freshness and the excitement of careering onward on the back of the superb steed which bore him and which had been purchased at Newcastle. As he was continuing his way, he suddenly heard cries of distress and shouts imploring succour, coming from a little distance. Fleming flung his regards in that direction whence they proceeded; and the source as well as the cause instantaneously became visible. A monk was dashing at the utmost of his speed across an adjacent meadow, pursued by a bull which was rapidly gaining upon him. The unfortunate priest's hood had fallen back from his head, leaving the bald crown exposed; and the long chain of his rosary was literally flying out behind him in consequence of the frenzied rate at which he was speeding. He had caught sight of our young hero in the next field; and hence the wild cries for succour which he was sending forth.

A glance showed Fitz-Allan this awkward and perilous predicament in which the poor monk was placed; and without a single instant's hesitation, the youth galloped to his assistance. A high fence of wattle-work was cleared at a bound: on dashed the steed, Fitz-Allan holding his boar-spear with a firm gripe in readiness to attack the maddened animal. Suddenly the monk, either tripping over something or utterly exhausted, fell headlong upon the grass: another moment and the bull would have been upon him—but Fleming, dashing the rowsels into the flanks of his steed, made the charger spring betwixt the prostrate priest and the enraged animal. This movement however, though so absolutely necessary to save the monk's life, cost our hero the steed which he bestrode; for the bull came rushing on; and at the same instant that the boar-spear was driven deep into the animal's body, the bull's long sharp horns were in revenge dashed a

deep into the charger's side. A terrific roar—for as such indeed it sounded—denoted the death-agony of the bull as it fell heavily upon the sward; and a plaintive neigh—almost a cry—of anguish was sent forth by the wounded horse.

The next instant Fleming was upon his feet in the field; and with another blow he despatched the cause of all this mischief. Then, before he paid the slightest attention to the monk, our hero examined the state of his steed: but he soon saw that there was no hope of saving it. The blood was welling forth in a torrent—for the poor beast's side was completely ripped open; its legs were bending under it—and it sank down upon the turf. In a few minutes it was dead; and Fleming dashed away the tears from his eyes as he turned towards the monk, who was now pouring forth the expressions of fervid gratitude for the signal service thus rendered him.

"It has cost you your steed, my son," said the holy father, who wore the garb of the Cistercian Order: "but the finest charger in the stables of Melrose shall be your compensation. It was a bold feat and a gallant one on your part!—for you sorely perilled your own life; and indeed I marvel how you have thus escaped all injury."

"Holy father," cried the youth, impatiently, "thanks for your promise of another steed—but it will be some time ere you can fulfil it; whereas I stand in immediate and most pressing need of a charger! I have an appointment to keep—important business to transact—a message to deliver—an errand to perform—"

"Patience, my son!" said the monk, perceiving that our hero spoke with rapid and excited utterance.

"Patience indeed!" cried Sir Fleming, smarting almost with a sense of exasperation at the idea that he would be much too late at the trysting-place, and that the Knight of Liddesdale would not tarry for him; "it is useless, holy father, to speak to me of patience! Tell me where at any neighbouring habitation I am likely to procure a steed to bear me—and a handful of gold shall repay him who lends it! Tell me, quick, Sir Priest! for you must know this neighbourhood well; and if you delay in your answer you will but ill requite the service I have rendered you!"

"A steed?" said the monk, gazing slowly around him, as if to settle his recollection upon any particular habitation where an animal might be procured. "In good sooth, my son, methinks that nowhere short of the mill yonder—"

Scarcely were the words pronounced when Fleming, who had already thrown the saddle and bridle over his shoulder, and had caught up his hunting-spear, dashed away towards the mill at so marvellous a rate, considering how he was laden with those ponderous horse-comparisons, that the monk stood gazing after him in astonishment; and when the youth disappeared behind a clump of trees, the holy father muttered to himself, "He is as fine-spirited a gallant as one could wish to meet. I owe him a life; and it would please me well to be enabled to render him some service. The golden spurs of chivalry are upon his heels: he is full green in years thus to wear the badge of knighthood!"

The Cistercian now moved away from the spot, and bent his steps towards a habitation at a little distance, where a person lying at the point of death required his ghostly comfort.

CHAPTER IV. c

LOVE.

WE must now return to the hostelry hearing the sign of the Unicorn. We have already said that the old Knight of Liddesdale and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan respectively succeeded in making their exit from the premises without exciting the suspicion of any of the inmates from whom it was desirable that their purpose should be concealed. Lady Albertina Roslin and Margaret Fitz-Allan occupied the same chamber: they were slumbering profoundly when the old knight and the young one left the hostelry; but about half-an-hour afterwards the beauteous blue eyes of Albertina opened, and their looks were met by the affectionate regards of the large dark orbs of her bosom-friend Margaret. Although it was yet so very early, the two young ladies rose; their maids were quickly in attendance—and their toilet was performed.

Albertina and Margaret now descended from their chamber, and issued from the hostelry to take a ramble through the fields and enjoy the morning air before the repast should be served up. It was a fair sight to behold that superbly handsome young woman of eighteen and that sweet interesting creature of seventeen, with such contrasting styles of beauty, linked together as if they were sisters. Margaret's arm was thrown lightly and gracefully around Albertina's slender waist; and thus, as they were so close, the fair hair of the Earl's daughter threw out the raven tresses of Margaret into a still darker relief; while the slightly brunette complexion of the latter rendered Albertina's skin all the more snowy in appearance, more delicate, and more transparent. The features of Albertina expressed an almost child-like purity and innocence, well calculated to interest the heart and win the love of all who gazed upon her: but on the other hand the countenance of Margaret told of firm decision, pride, and even hauteur, and perhaps somewhat of self-will also. Her dark well arched eyebrows were surmounted by a high open forehead, which seemed alike the throne of intelligence and of strength of mind: her nose was straight,—and her chin was softly rounded, thus completing with a slight expression of sensuousness the oval of that countenance all the upper part of which was full of mind and intellect.

For some few minutes the two ladies walked on in silence. At length Margaret gently said, "You were much afflicted, dearest Albertina, by the misadventure which occurred last evening to my brother."

"And you also were afflicted, Margaret," replied the Earl's daughter, as a blush crimsoned her countenance.

"Yes—we were both grieved, my sweet friend," said Margaret. "And no wonder," she added after a moment's pause; "for we both love him!"

Albertina bent down her beauteous blue eyes; and as the blush still lingered upon her cheeks, as if the delicate tint of the rose had temporarily borrowed the hue of the carnation, she said, as if almost unconscious that she was speaking audibly, "Yes—we both love him."

"But tell me, dearest Albertina," inquired Margaret, who for an instant had been earnestly watching her friend's countenance, "are you sure that Fleming has in no way suffered in your estimation on account of that defeat?"

"Suffered, Margaret?—suffered in my estimation?" exclaimed Albertina, her soft silvery voice deriving power and energy from the depth of the

emotion with which she spoke. "Oh, no! is it possible that you can entertain such an opinion of me? I felt for Fleming as if it were I myself who had sustained some grievous calamity. In a word, Margaret, you know that I love him: for it was you yourself who led me to understand the true sense in which I loved him!"—and here the Earl's daughter again bent down her looks, which were full of confusion, while her cheeks were suffused with blushes.

"And you know, my sweet friend," continued Margaret, "how fondly, how devotedly, how adoringly Fleming cherishes your image! Did he not assure you, when he knelt at your feet after the grand tournament at Versailles, that if he were enabled to perform deeds of prowess so marvellous in one so youthful and unskilled as he, it was because he knew that *your* eyes were bent upon him? Is there not happiness, Albertina, in being thus fondly loved? Oh, yes! there must be!"

"And yet, Margaret," answered the high-born damsel, "I know not how it is—but my happiness seems not altogether complete. With you, my dear friend, I have no secrets—to you I have been ever accustomed, even from our childhood, to reveal every thought which my mind has harboured. Now therefore that the discourse has turned upon this topic, let me speak seriously to you—let me ask your counsel?"

"Speak, Albertina," said Margaret, for a moment surveying the Earl's daughter with a glittering expression of uneasiness in her eyes.

"The idea, Margaret, often steals into my brain," proceeded Albertina, "that I am wrong to conceal from my father the sentiments which I entertain towards Fleming, and which he reciprocates. But you yourself have told me that there was no need to be precipitate in making this revelation—that an opportune moment must be awaited—and that it was unnecessary to perplex my sire with other considerations at a period when he had so much to think of—his correspondence with his friends in Scotland—the generous intervention of the French King in his behalf—then the preparations for departure—the journey—"

"Yes, Albertina," said Margaret, "I know that it has been through my advice you have kept your sentiments a secret from your father: but this reserve need be no longer maintained! You shall speak to the Earl—you shall throw yourself into his arms—you shall whisper to his ear that your happiness depends upon his assent—"

"And what if he were to chide me, Margaret?" said the fair-haired damsel: "what if he were to speak harshly to me?"

"Your father loves you, Albertina," rejoined Margaret; "you are the object of all his care and interest—you are his only child—and not for worlds would he draw forth a tear from your eye! You see moreover—especially from what he said last night—that the Earl is too magnanimous and high-minded to think lightly or indifferently of Fleming because he belongs to a branded race; and this circumstance will not therefore militate against the hopes which you entertain and which my brother has dared to cherish. Yes, Albertina!—you shall avail yourself of the first befitting opportunity to speak to your father!"

"I cannot do it, Margaret—I cannot do it!" cried the young maiden, bursting into tears. "I should feel overwhelmed with confusion—I should not be enabled to give utterance to a word! No, no! it is *you*, my dear friend, who must speak to my sire—or at least prepare the way!"

"This will be difficult, if not altogether inconvenient and improper," murmured Margaret in a

musings tone. "Nevertheless," she almost immediately added in a more audible manner, "leave it to me, Albertina—and all shall yet go well! But I wonder that Fleming has not descended from his chamber: he is not accustomed to play the sluggard. Let us return to the hostelry and seek him."

The two young ladies accordingly retraced their way to the inn, which was now beginning to wear a bustling appearance, as all the inmates had risen. As Albertina and Margaret approached the door, the Earl of Caithness himself issued forth; and having affectionately greeted them both, he said, "If you are not already wearied with your ramble, let us roam together for a little distance through these fields; for the morning air is delightful—there is just a sufficiency of the breeze to prove invigorating—and I learn from our host that it will be yet an hour ere he can set upon the table such a repast as he thinks it fitting to serve up."

The two maidens accordingly turned, and began to retrace, in company with the Earl, the way which they had previously been pursuing alone together.

"We were speaking last night," said his lordship, "upon matters intimately relating to yourself, Margaret, and your brother;—and methinks that the moment is now come, Albertina, when I ought to make a certain revelation to *your* ear."

"To mine, dear father?" said the damsel, looking up all artlessly and unobtrusively into her sire's countenance.

"Yes—to your ear, my sweet child," responded the nobleman, as he gazed with all a parent's love and pride upon the exquisitely beautiful face of his daughter; for the freshness of the morning air had heightened the colour upon her cheeks, and the breeze was playing with her long fair shining tresses. "So long as we were exiles from our native land, it was useless for me to recall past arrangements or to think of projects for the future. But now that we have once more set our feet upon Caledonia's soil, and that in the course of this day we shall enter upon our own domain and tread in the old halls of Roslin, it behoves me, Albertina, to lose no time in making you acquainted with the projects which my soul cherishes for the ensurance of your future happiness."

The Earl paused: Albertina now kept her looks bent downward; while Margaret flung upon the nobleman's countenance a glance of anxious inquiry. Could it be possible that the Earl of Caithness had all along designed that his daughter should bestow her hand upon Fleming Fitz-Allan?—was he now about to make such an announcement? or on the other hand, had he formed any project which would be fatal to the hopes of the youthful lovers? These questions did Margaret rapidly ask herself; while some such ideas, though less positive and distinct, sprang up into the mind of Albertina.

"You, my dear Margaret," proceeded the Earl of Caithness, "may well be a listener to the intelligence which I have now to communicate to my daughter; for you have been reared together from your infancy—you are towards each other as sisters—and I know that whatsoever regards one, must be an object of interest to both. It is the same too with Fleming; because if he were now here, I should speak likewise in his presence: for to you, Albertina, he stands in the light of a brother—and I know that you regard him with a sisterly affection."

The Earl's daughter was now full of bewilderment and confusion, while her sensations were not altogether free from alarm. She still kept her looks bent downward, and said nothing. Margaret's anxiety was increasing: hope was rapidly yielding to fear in her bosom.

"A little while before circumstances compelled me to quit Scotland seven years back," resumed the Earl, "I entered into a compact—But let me come at once to the point!" he suddenly interrupted himself: and then he said, "You cannot have forgotten, my child, that fine handsome youth, Roland Mountjoy, who used frequently to visit Roslin Castle with his father the Earl of Bassentyne?"

"Yes—I remember him well," replied Albertina, in a low tone: for there was now a growing consternation in the damsel's brain, as her instinct became quickened by the sense of approaching calamity.

"You know also," continued Lord Caithness, "that the Earl of Bassentyne died some two years back, and that Roland Mountjoy has therefore succeeded to his father's ancient title and princely domains. I have corresponded with Roland—though I have hitherto mentioned not the circumstance in your hearing; but I have reason to know that to-morrow, amongst the first of those former friends who will repair to Roslin to greet us on our return, will be the young Earl of Bassentyne. From you, my child, he will receive a suitable welcome—for it is your future husband whom you are thus soon to meet!"

Albertina still said nothing: she walked on mechanically by her father's side—her looks were still bent downward, so that he could not see her face: but Margaret, with a rapid glance, obtained a glimpse thereof—she saw that it was deadly pale, and that it wore an expression of mute stupefaction and despair. She herself was enabled to exercise the completest control over her feelings, not merely because of her natural strength of mind, but likewise because the Earl's speech had gradually prepared her for some such *dénouement* as this. Still it was more or less a shock for Margaret, inasmuch as the reader may have suspected that her heart was ambitious, and she had buoyed herself up with the hope that she should see her brother some day conduct to the altar the high-born daughter of the Earl of Caithness. Whether she all in a moment yielded to this blow, and made up her mind that everything was at an end in reference to her darling project, we cannot now say. Certain however it is that Margaret Fitz-Allan felt that *this* was not the opportune moment to reveal the truth to the Earl of Caithness, and tell that nobleman how her brother had won his daughter's heart:—she therefore said nothing. As for the Earl himself, he was very far from suspecting that the announcement which he had made could have produced so tremendous an effect upon his daughter, or could have threatened to derange any plans which Margaret might have formed. He therefore looked upon Albertina's silence as the natural result of maiden bashfulness and coyness under existing circumstances; while he also regarded it as a proof of her willing obedience to the parental decree. He could not see her countenance, for it was completely bent downward as she clung to her sire's arm,—thus clinging in reality for support, while he fancied that it was the affectionate clinging of a child to a parent who had studied his best to promote and ensure her happiness.

At this conjuncture a warrior in complete armour was seen riding across the meadow at a little distance, and approaching the Earl and the two ladies. The knightly plumes waved above his helmet; and he was speedily recognised as Sir Casimir D'Este.

"Ah!" ejaculated the Earl; "hither comes our friend of the Teutonic Order! It is doubtless as an act of courtesy that he has ridden across thus early from Melrose to pay his respects."

Lord Caithness stepped forward to greet the

Knight; and Margaret, seizing the opportunity, whispered to Albertina, "For heaven's sake compose yourself, my sweet friend! Conquer your emotions—betray nothing by your looks—and all may yet be well!"

"Do you think so, Margaret?" inquired the young damsel, suddenly starting with a thrill of hope,—that hope which was so necessary to her who but an instant before was plunged into mute, blank despair!

"Yes, Albertina!—lose not your courage!" rejoined Margaret, rapidly. "It is impossible that your father, who loves you so tenderly, will do aught to consummate your unhappiness!"

The Earl's daughter was infinitely relieved by this encouraging assurance; and her looks brightened up somewhat. The two ladies now hastened forward to receive the greetings of the Teutonic Knight, who had already exchanged courteous compliments with the Earl.

"And where is my young friend Sir Fleming?" asked the warrior.

"I have not seen him this morning," replied the Earl; "and I was just now marvelling that he should be thus belated; for he is not wont to play the part of a sluggard. Margaret, have you as yet seen your brother?"

"No, my lord," she replied; "and I also was ere now wondering that he should linger in-doors instead of seeking the fresh air."

"Come," cried the Earl; "let us proceed to the hostelry and make inquiries for this sound sleeper! You are in time, Sir Casimir, to partake of our repast—at which your presence will be all the more welcome, inasmuch as it affords us a pleasure we little expected."

The party proceeded towards the hostelry, in front of which they found young Seton, who was now deeply anxious on account of Fitz-Allan; for upwards of two hours had elapsed since his departure.

"Where is Sir Fleming, boy?" inquired the Earl of Caithness.

"He has not yet returned, my lord," answered the youth, instantaneously composing his features into the habitual expression of calm respectfulness.

"Not returned?" ejaculated the Earl. "Ah! then it appears that we have done him an injustice while taxing him with being a sluggard;—whereas doubtless it will prove after all that he was the first to breathe the fresh air of morning."

"Even so, my lord," rejoined Seton. "Sir Fleming went out soon after sunrise, with a boarspear—"

"Ah! that is more like Fleming Fitz-Allan than loitering in his couch!" exclaimed the Earl, with an air of satisfaction. "Doubtless he will bring us a boar's head as the produce of the chase; and in the meantime we will enter the hostelry and await his return."

"Proceed, my lord," said Sir Casimir, dismounting from his horse: "I will but assure myself that my steed is duly stabled—and then will I rejoin your lordship and the fair ladies."

The nobleman entered the building, in company with his daughter and Margaret Fitz-Allan; and the instant that they were beyond earshot, Sir Casimir said to young Seton, "Where is your master? Be not afraid to speak candidly; for I know what was pending—and indeed I promised to be present as umpire and witness of the meeting."

"I know not, Sir Knight, what has happened—nor where my young master is," replied Seton. "I am deeply anxious!—he should have returned long

ago. He went forth soon after the sun had risen above the eastern hills."

"Yes, true to the hour!" ejaculated the Knight. "And have you any means of knowing whether Sir William Douglas likewise proceeded?—But wherefore should I ask? It were almost an insult to the stout old Knight of Liddesdale to place the point upon a doubt!"

"I know, Sir Knight," answered Seton, "that the Knight of Liddesdale left the hostelry within a few minutes after Sir Fleming took his departure."

"And has he returned?—has Sir William Douglas come back?" demanded the Teutonic Knight.

The reply was in the negative; and again were young Seton's looks flung anxiously across the meadows in the direction of the mill.

"This is strange! most strange!" said Sir Casimir D'Este. "Could there have been any mistake made in respect to the place of appointment? Was it not—"

"The copse between yonder mill and Closeburn Tower," replied Seton. "I myself was last evening the bearer of my master's gauntlet to the old Knight of Liddesdale. Sir Fleming left it to the old Knight to name the place—Sir William Douglas at first spoke of a spot within the forest—but inasmuch as Sir Fleming could know nothing of the windings and intricacies of the vast Ettrick woods, I respectfully begged Sir William to indicate a spot so well defined, so prominent, and so conspicuous, that it would be impossible for my young master to mistake it. Thus, though the Ettrick Forest is comparatively close at hand, Sir William named that copse, which though more remote, was nevertheless deemed more suitable for the prevention of all errors."

"And to that copse did I myself proceed at the appointed hour," said the Teutonic Knight: "but I found neither Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan nor Sir William Douglas. I waited awhile—they came not—and experiencing some degree of suspense on Sir Fleming's part, I determined to ride to this hostelry to make inquiries. I must now join the Earl and the ladies—or they will wonder at my prolonged absence."

Sir Casimir D'Este repaired to the apartment where Lord Caithness, Albertina, and Margaret were now awaiting his presence in order to take their seats at the board on which the morning meal was served. But scarcely had he thus made his appearance, when the sounds of galloping horses reached the ears of those present. They glanced through the window, and beheld some half-dozen armed men, well mounted, rein in their steeds in front of the hostelry.

"It is the Douglas plaid!" said Lord Caithness; "and those are the retainers of the Earl of Douglas, kinsman of the Knight of Liddesdale."

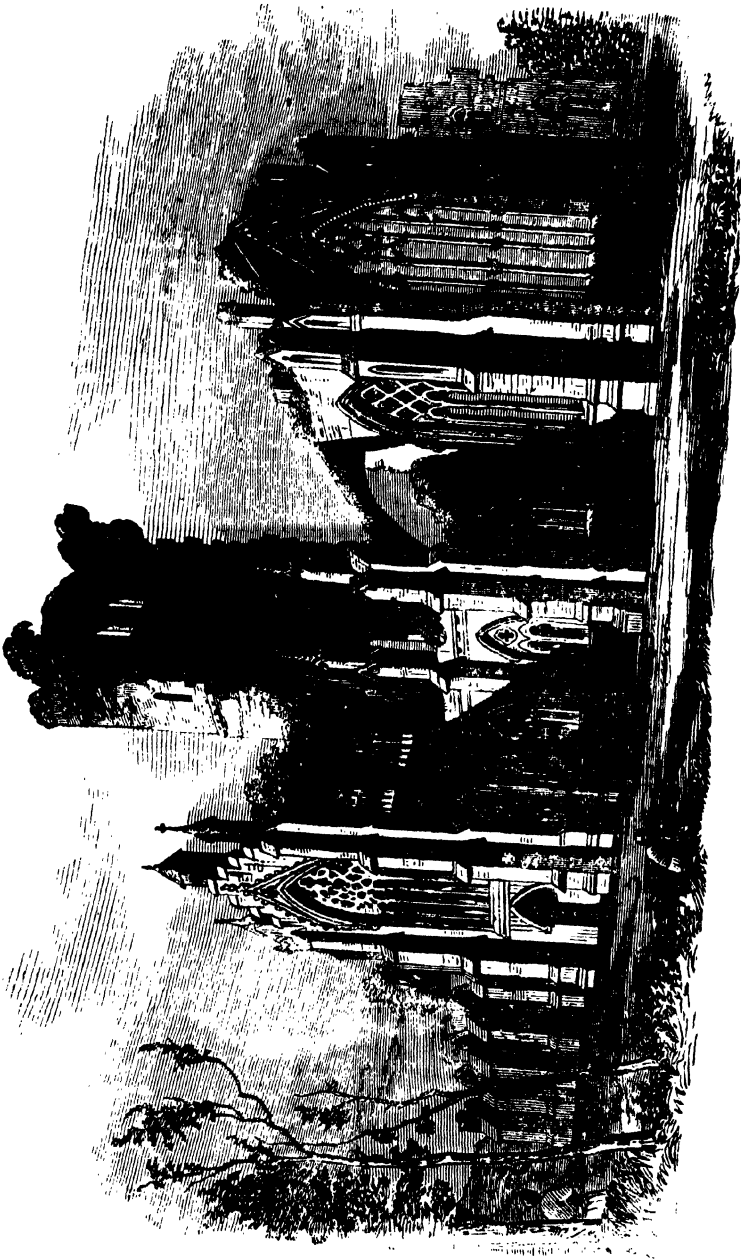
"Yes," observed Sir Casimir: "we were yesterday told that the Earl of Douglas was hunting in these parts, and that he held his quarters at Closeburn Tower. While passing that way this morning, I beheld several of his retainers preparing for the day's chase—"

"These men who have just arrived," interrupted the Earl, "are speaking angrily and loudly! What can it mean?"

At this moment the door of the apartment opened; and the landlord entered, closely followed by one of the men who had just arrived.

"Alas, my lord, what terrible tidings! woe is me!" exclaimed the landlord, who seemed to be fearfully excited.

"What ails you, man?" demanded the Teutonic Knight, striding forward and grasping the landlord



No. 3.—MARGARET.

by the arm: for he was smitten with the apprehension that something fatal had occurred to Fleming Fitz-Allan.

"The stout Knight of Liddesdale!" cried the landlord; "the gallant old Knight! Scotland may mourn him yet, despite all that has been said—"

"Mourn him?" echoed Sir Casimir, his mind suddenly experiencing an immense relief on young Fitz-Allan's behalf. "What mean you? Speak, man—speak!"

"The Knight of Liddesdale, my master's gallant kinsman," said the Earl of Douglas's retainer, now pressing forward into the room, "has been foully murdered!"

"Murdered!"—and the terrible word was echoed from the lips of the Earl of Caithness as well as those of Margaret: but Albertina was held silent by dismay at the dreadful announcement.

"Use not that term," exclaimed the Teutonic Knight, in a stern commanding voice, "until you can prove that Sir William Douglas fell not in fair combat!"

"I repeat," cried the Douglas retainer vehemently, "the Knight of Liddesdale has been foully murdered: and I am here to seek—"

At this instant another horseman galloped up to the front of the tavern; and Margaret, ejaculating, "My brother!" rushed from the apartment.

The idea had already smitten her that there had possibly been a duel between Fleming and Sir William Douglas; and she was just on the point of repelling with indignation the idea that the old Knight had been assassinated, when her brother dashed past the window on the steed that bore him.

But scarcely had he reined in the animal in front of the hostelry, when he was seized upon by the emissaries of the Earl of Douglas—while Margaret sprang forth from the threshold.

"Back, caitiffs! What mean ye by this outrage?" exclaimed Fleming, offering a desperate resistance with his boar-spear.

"Surrender in the King's name!" cried his assailants. "Surrender also in the name of the high and mighty lord the Earl of Douglas!"

"Unhand him!" cried Margaret vehemently and indignantly. "He is innocent!—he is incapable of such a foul deed!"

"Innocent? incapable of what?" demanded Fleming, suddenly desisting from the vigour with which he was repelling the attack and even beating off his assailants.

"Ah! he affects ignorance!" cried the Douglas retainers: "he will deny that he knows aught of the foul murder of the old Knight of Liddesdale!"

A deadly pallor seized upon Fitz-Allan's countenance—the boar-spear dropped from his hand—and the next instant he was dragged from the horse by the men, who now pounced upon him like tigers on their prey.

CHAPTER V.

THE EARL OF DOUGLAS.

THE entire scene with which the preceding chapter concluded—from the moment Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan galloped up to the front of the hostelry until he was torn down from his horse by the fierce Borderers, as the retainers of Douglas were generally termed—occupied scarcely a minute. But now came forth the Teutonic Knight, sheathed in complete armour as he was; and with his huge sword

in his hand, he exclaimed, "Let go your hold on that youth!—or by St. Jude! there will be sanguinary work in another instant!"

"Then let it commence at once!" cried the Douglas retainer who had sought the party in the room, and who had rushed forth from the hostelry close on the heels of Margaret and the Teutonic warrior. "I, Magnus Balveny, Captain in the service of the mighty Lord, the Earl of Douglas—"

"Then, as one holding authority, Master Balveny," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "you would do well to order the instantaneous release—"

"It is thus, Sir Knight, that I show my resolve to keep my prisoner!"—and Balveny aimed a tremendous blow at the Teutonic warrior.

What followed took place in an incredibly short space of time, and was as marvellous in its details as it was rapid in its execution. Captain Balveny's sword was snapped in twain by the force with which it was met, with clashing din, by Sir Casimir's ponderous weapon; and then a terrific buffet dealt by the Knight's gauntleted hand, levelled the Borderer senseless on the ground. Into the midst of the other armed men who held Fleming a prisoner, dashed Sir Casimir D'Este. The eye that possessed eagle-like swiftness enough to follow his movements, might have perceived that he sought to avoid the taking of life; but the blows which he dealt right and left with the hilt of his sword in one hand and with the clenched gauntlet of the other, poured like hail upon the Borderers. Of the five who had surrounded Fitz-Allan, two were at once hurled senseless across the prostrate body of their leader Balveny—a third, lying upon his side, was wiping away with his plaid the blood that gushed from his mouth and nostrils—and the other two, having first recoiled perforce from the rude buffets dealt them, now rushed upon the Knight with their drawn weapons. But in the twinkling of an eye one was added to the heap of stunned and insensible Borderers; while the other was instantaneously prostrated by a blow dealt by young Fitz-Allan. Thus, in far less time than it has taken us to describe the fray, Sir Casimir D'Este was master of the field, and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan found himself at liberty.

"What madman is this foreign knight?" exclaimed the landlord of the Unicorn, rushing forward in dismay and consternation: "does he know whom he has thus severely dealt with? The Black Douglas will be down upon us all—and in a common vengeance fearfully wreaked, shall we every one be swept away!"

"Cease your prating," exclaimed Sir Casimir; "and see that you and your fellows minister quickly to these Borderers. I meant not to take the life of any one of them; and full sorry should I be—"

"Oh, Sir Casimir!" cried Margaret, seizing the Knight's gauntleted hand and pressing it between both her own; "you have nobly deported yourself!"—then flying to her brother, and throwing her arms about his neck, she exclaimed, "Tell me, Fleming—Oh! tell me, that you are innocent of this dreadful charge!"—for the damsel's mind was filled with the image of deadly pallor and consternation which the young Knight had presented to her view at the moment he was accused of the foul murder of the old Knight of Liddesdale.

"Yes, Margaret, I am innocent!" cried Fleming, whose proud indignant bearing now contrasted strikingly with his pale and dismayed aspect of but a few minutes back.

"And I can vouch for it," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "that if the old Knight of Liddesdale have fallen by the hand of my young friend here, it must have been in fair fight: for though by some mistake or mishap I lost the spectacle of the fray, yet do I

know that it was to an honourable combat Sir Fleming went forth."

"Whatever be the consequences of this sad affair," said the Earl of Caithness, now advancing towards the Teutonic Knight, "the gratitude of me and mine is not the less your due!"

Albertina was leaning upon her father's arm: the face of the timid maiden was very pale—but all of a sudden she seemed as if she exerted an effort over herself; and stepping forward, she took Fleming's hand, saying in a low, half tender, half reproachful tone, "Oh, in what sad complications do you involve your friends!"

No one heard these words but she who spoke them, he to whom they were addressed, and Margaret Fitz Allan: and the young Knight was about to reply, when there was a sudden exclamation on the part of the landlord of the Unicorn of "The Douglas! the Douglas!"

"The kinsman of our slaughtered master!" ejaculated the chief page of the old Knight of Liddesdale, who as well as his brother page, and every other inmate of the hostelry, had by this time appeared upon the scene of these rapid and startling incidents.

And sure enough, at a little distance a troop of about thirty horsemen were seen galloping towards the hostelry. The Teutonic Knight, as if inspired by that fierce or desperate courage which recked not for numbers, quickly closed the vizor of his helmet; and he grasped his weapon, which a few moments back he had sheathed, with the air of a man who was resolved to fight unto the last. Sir Fleming Fitz Allan at the same time brandished his own sword: the young Seton was quickly by his side; and the male retainers of the Earl of Caithness showed by their looks and movements that they were equally ready to combat under the auspices of the redoubtable Sir Casimir D'Este.

"Holy Virgin! more bloodshed!" exclaimed Albertina, with a face as colourless as at first; and shrinking back towards her father, she clung to his arm for support.

"Sir Casimir," said the Earl of Caithness, in a tone of mingled firmness and entreaty, "enough of strife for the nonce! Were the odds less frightfully against us or the circumstances more desperate, this word would not be spoken from my lips, nor would this sword remain sheathed by my side. But it were utter madness to dare so unequal an encounter; while the innocence of Fitz Allan is already sufficiently vindicated. Leave it to me to settle this matter with the Douglas!"

"Be it as you will, my lord," said Sir Casimir. "But remember, that if a hand be laid in violence upon me—"

"I pledge you my word as a gentleman and a peer," quickly responded the Earl of Caithness, "that I will put this matter right with the Douglas!"

"Tis well," rejoined Sir Casimir. "For the sake of the ladies 'twere better to avoid more bloodshed:"—and his ponderous weapon was returned to the sheath.

In a few moments the Earl of Douglas galloped up to the spot, followed by some thirty of his retainers. They were all in hunting-garb, completely equipped for the chase; and a finer or fiercer set of men it would have been difficult to find even throughout those border counties where all the male Saxon inhabitants were remarkable for their powerful athletic frames, their martial habits, and their readiness for warfare.

"What do I behold?" exclaimed the Earl of Douglas, reining in his steed, and flinging a fierce, rapid, angry glance over the scene where some of his followers still lay in a state of insensibility and

others were painfully raising themselves up. "By St. Bride! there is here work to be revenged! What ho, my men! seize upon them all, every one of them!"

"Hold, my lord!" interrupted the Earl of Caithness, stepping forward with a proud dignity, after having consigned his fainting daughter to the arms of Margaret, while Sir Casimir D'Este had already half drawn his terrible brand from its sheath.

"What do I see?" vociferated the Black Douglas. "Yes! it must be the Earl of Caithness!—and he ranged on the side of those who dare thus maltreat the wearers of my plaid!"

"Be not hasty, my lord," said the Earl of Caithness, "in coming to conclusions. Let there be reasonable speech betwixt you and me."

"Reasonable speech, my lord?" exclaimed the Earl of Douglas. "By St. Bride! my respect for the friendship which was wont to subsist between your lordship and myself, has already exceeded bounds but little known to the Douglas in the presence of such a spectacle as this! Howbeit, if there must be parley betwixt us, let it be when the assassin of my kinsman shall be in the custody of my fellows."

"My lord," responded the Earl of Caithness, still with a noble dignity and firmness, "there is no assassin holding any companionship with me. If you have plaint to make, let it be judicially investigated; and I pledge myself that the accused shall be forthcoming to assert and maintain his innocence."

"If the matter be put upon this ground," answered the Earl of Douglas, "I am content to let it so remain; and this I do from motives of ancient respect and friendship for your lordship."

"And I proclaim," said Magnus Balveny, who in the meantime had recovered his consciousness and raised himself up from the ground, "that this false knight Sir Fleming Fitz Allan hath treacherously murdered your lordship's kinsman the old Chief of Liddesdale!"

"And I maintain," said Fleming, indignantly, while his dark eyes flashed fire, and the rich youthful blood mantled in angry crimson upon his cheeks, "that you, Magnus Balveny, lie most foully in your throat!"

"Hold!" pealed the stentorian voice of the Earl of Douglas: "we will at once inquire farther into this matter."

"With my full consent, my lord," said the Earl of Caithness: then turning to the ireful youth, he added peremptorily, "Peace and patience, Fleming! Let us hear the charge as it stands against you; for the cause of truth and innocence needs not to be vindicated by passion."

"Yes, my young friend," said Sir Casimir D'Este, now raising the vizor of his helmet, "the Earl of Caithness speaks well—and the Earl of Douglas seems properly and lawfully inclined in this matter. The quicker the investigation, the sooner the manifestation of your innocence, and the better the justification of the succour which I lent towards your release."

"Speak, Balveny," said the Earl of Douglas. "How say you, my faithful follower?—what know you of this matter?"

"So please you, my lord," replied the Captain, "I was here at the Unicorn last evening, quaffing a cup of ale with my ancient acquaintance the stout landlord—when he told me of a fray which had taken place some half-hour previously, betwixt the old Knight of Liddesdale and this youthful wearer of golden spurs. The youngster, it would seem, came off the worst from the contest—the arm of the stalwart old Knight, tailed him not—Sir Fleming was

dashed to the ground—and on rising therefrom, he proclaimed his intent to seek a deadly revenge. Thereupon the landlord rebuked him; and he is here to give me the lie if I have spoken falsely.

"In good sooth, my lord," said the burly master of the Unicorn, "it all occurred precisely as the worthy Captain Magnus Balveny has reported it. Appeal may be made to the noble Earl of Caithness, to these ladies, or to the foreign Knight—who seems to possess the arm of a very demon!" added the landlord in a lower tone.

"No such appeal need be made!" exclaimed Fleming Fitz-Allan, stepping forward with every appearance of the noblest and loftiest frankness. "I admit the words; and sorry am I that in the rage and shame of defeat, such impetuous language should have issued from my lips. But their meaning was neither treacherous nor unknighly. The signification which I intended was simply that on another occasion I would seek to vindicate my own fame and inflict due chastisement upon my aggressor, in fair and equal combat."

"And I, my lord, can prove," said young Seton, "that I last night bore the gauntlet of my master Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan to the Knight of Liddesdale, by whom it was accepted; and arrangements were duly made for the combat to take place this morning, under all circumstances of privacy, in the copse between the mill and Closeburn Tower."

"Ah, the copse!" exclaimed the Earl of Douglas. "Was it not there that my lamented kinsman, the stout Knight of Liddesdale, was found murdered?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Magnus Balveny. "It was I myself, with my own special followers, who there discovered the corpse. A holy monk—Father Cyrus of Melrose—shortly afterwards came up—"

"And I, my lord," said the chief huntsman of the Earl of Douglas, "was alone in another part of the copse; and I beheld a certain youth riding thence hastily away: but I took no special note of the circumstance until a few minutes afterwards, when I came upon the spot where Balveny and his men had found the murdered Knight. Then, on describing this youth, the worthy Captain Balveny at once recognised him as Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, of whom he had caught a glimpse at the Unicorn last night—"

"And remembering what I had heard from the landlord," resumed Balveny, taking up the tale in his turn, "I naturally concluded that the youthful Knight had only too well fulfilled his vindictive threat against the stout Chief of Liddesdale. So, leaving the monk and two or three of my men to transport the corpse to Melrose, I sent the huntsman to the Tower to communicate the sad tidings to your lordship; while I with my other followers sped hither in haste to capture the assassin."

"Assassin again in your teeth!" ejaculated Fitz-Allan fiercely.

"Silence, young man!" exclaimed the Earl of Douglas sternly. "Harsh words are but sorry proofs of innocence."

"But because my young friend here," exclaimed the Teutonic Knight, "was seen issuing from the copse at a particular moment, is he on that account to be branded as an assassin? As well accuse me; for I myself must at about the same time have been in the copse, in search for the intending combatants; but I beheld no one. Or again, as well accuse this huntsman of your's, my Lord of Douglas!—for he admits that he was likewise alone in the wood at that particular time. At all events, it is clear that in a copse which covers some hundred acres, scenes may be taking place in one spot

totally unknown or unsuspected by persons in another. I have called this young Knight my friend; and so I shall esteem him until better evidence be brought to prove him the author of a crime for which every true warrior and honest man will scout and shun him."

Fleming Fitz-Allan darted upon Sir Casimir D'Este a look of deep gratitude for the generous defence thus made on his behalf; and then the young Knight exclaimed, "Did not my conscience tell me that I was worthy of such chivalrous friendship, I should sink overpowered by the weight of shame, degradation, and guilt. But listen to me, my Lord of Douglas!—for there is still a gap to be filled up in my narrative—"

"Aye! a gap," ejaculated Magnus Balveny, "which you, young springald, will find it difficult—"

"Silence, sirrah!" interrupted the Earl of Caithness: "interfere not with Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan's defence; for you were allowed your own leisure in pressing your accusation."

"Yes, be silent, Balveny," said the Earl of Douglas. "We will give the fairest complexion, as in duty bound, to these proceedings. Speak, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan: we are ready to hear you."

"I went forth, my lord, at a suitable hour this morning," proceeded our hero, "to be punctual at the trysting-place. To this fact my page Seton can attest. On my way I had the good fortune to save the life of a monk of Melrose—"

"It was Father Cyrus," interjected Balveny: "he spoke to me of that adventure."

"It was an adventure which delayed me considerably, and at the time much to my regret," proceeded Fitz-Allan; "for my good steed was slain by the enraged bull. I feared to be late at the trysting-place, and to be deemed a backslider and a poltroon by the stout Knight of Liddesdale, who I full well knew would fail not to be in the copse to the precise moment. I sped onward to the mill; and there I borrowed the horse which you may behold here. Then I rode on to the copse: but there had been a sad wasting of time, and I was nearly a full hour too late. I met a woodman to whom I put the hasty question whether he had seen a warrior waiting anywhere in the copse? He gave answer to the effect that he had just beheld a warrior issue from the wood and ride rapidly in a particular direction. I made no further inquiry—for I concluded that it was the Knight of Liddesdale who, wearied with waiting, and deeming me a coward, had hastened back to the hostelry. But doubtless after all it was Sir Casimir D'Este, my chivalrous friend here, to whom the woodman alluded—which is all the more probable, seeing, as I learn, that Sir Casimir arrived at the hostelry only a few minutes before myself: for on receiving that information from the woodman, I turned my horse's head and galloped hitherward, impatient to give suitable explanations to the Knight of Liddesdale. And now one word more. If at the moment when—"

"Perhaps," interrupted Magnus Balveny, "Sir Fleming will inform your lordship why it was that he turned so deadly pale, and dropped his boarspear when my men proclaimed the accusation—"

"To that very point was I coming," said Fitz-Allan, "when you again interrupted me. My explanation shall be given. I had no vindictive feelings, in the mean and paltry sense of the term, against the Knight of Liddesdale: my purpose was only to meet him in fair and equal fight, and to stand upon the consequences. I honoured his courage, and I even felt flattered at the thought of en-

countering a warrior of such tried prowess—though, in good sooth, I had otherwise little respect for his character. Nevertheless, when the intelligence suddenly burst upon me that the Knight of Liddesdale was foully murdered, I was for a moment overcome by a variety of feelings—horror of the deed—a shock sustained at the thought that one of such knightly prowess should perish so lamentably—bitter mortification that I must still rest under the stigma of defeat—and consternation at the charge that was levelled against myself. It was, beneath all these combined influences that I succumbed, and that for a moment I was paralysed and that my cheek grew deadly pale!”

The youth ceased speaking; and the Teutonic Knight, grasping his hand, exclaimed, “I believe you, my young friend!—there’s truth upon your tongue!”

“And I also,” said the Earl of Caithness, “entertain the fullest confidence in the innocence of the knightly youth on whom in some sense I look almost as my adopted son!”

“In which case, my lord,” interjected the Earl of Douglas, “you are scarcely an impartial judge in the present instance.”

“Nor are you, my lord,” responded the Earl of Caithness firmly; “for it is touching the death of your own kinsman that you are likewise enacting the part of judge!”

“Fairly enough spoken, my lord,” said the Earl of Douglas; “and right well pleased am I that there should be mutual agreement betwixt us in respect to our incompetency to decide in the present case.”

“But I maintain,” cried the Earl of Caithness, now for the first time displaying the vehemence of excited emotions, “that Sir Fleming Fitz Allan hath fully fended and proven his guiltlessness!”

“And I maintain,” said the Earl of Douglas, haughtily, “that Sir Fleming Fitz Allan hath advanced nothing to gainsay the accusation of guilt!”

“Then there must be appeal to another tribunal,” responded the Earl of Caithness; “and to this I aff the more readily assent on Sir Fleming Fitz Allan’s behalf, because there will not merely be the certitude of his own innocence sustaining ampler proof, but likewise the probability that the real authorship of this foul crime may be brought to light. The copse which was the scene of the assassin-deed, is within the domain of Melrose, where the holy Father Benedictus exercises all seigniorial power and wields the authority of spiritual Abbot and temporal Baron, with the additional attributes of judge and magistrate. To him let appeal be made!”

“Your lordship,” answered the Earl of Douglas, “shall have no reason to proclaim that by word or act of mine aught of obstacle has been thrown in the way of the full and fair investigation of this most deplorable case. To the Lord Abbot of Melrose let it be accordingly referred. I hold the honourable pledge of the Earl of Caithness, that the youth shall be forthcoming, and that within the lapse of an hour or two he be in such temporary prisonage as the Lord Abbot or his deputy may appoint within the walls of Melrose.”

“That solemn pledge do I give, my lord,” answered the Earl of Caithness. “Within two hours from the present time will I be at Melrose with the whole of my party; for this matter shall be sifted to the very uttermost ere I cross the threshold of Roslin Castle!”

“But that onslaught which was made upon me and my men,” exclaimed Magnus Balveny, “by the foreign Knight, who is an alien and a stranger amongst us—is it not now to form another, though secondary subject for investigation?”

“Let it pass, worthy Magnus,” said the Earl of

Douglas, with a fierce scowl; for he liked as little as might be the idea that his fierce Borderers should have succumbed beneath the arm of a single man. “What is the state of your followers, Captain?”

“No life has been lost, my lord,” answered Balveny, glancing around him; “and we are all ready for departure.”

“Then to horse! and away with you!” cried the Black Douglas; and with a cold salutation to the Earl of Caithness—for existing circumstances wore the aspect of an incipient feud—the fierce nobleman wheeled round his steed and rode rapidly away at the head of his party.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ABBOT OF MELROSE.

THE traveller to one of those beautiful vales which are washed by the waters of the Tweed, in the county of Roxburgh, will find the ruins of the once far-famed Abbey of Melrose: but still a sufficiency of the dilapidated and dismantled building is left to afford an idea of what its mingled statelyness, grandeur, and beauty must have been in those times ere the influence of decay had reached it. And may not the imagination give completeness to that which is now but an architectural skeleton,—fill up with masonry the fallen portions—cover all with a roof—erect the pinnacles where the principle of uniformity shows that they once existed—give form and shapeliness to the huge central tower—and otherwise so reconstruct the entire edifice, that to the mind’s eye it may again stand in all its intact fairness and magnificence? And then, if imagination would still further stretch itself, it might build up the cloisters, the outhouses, and the other structures which once belonged to the Abbey, and which fitted the whole pile to serve as a great monastic establishment.

In the times of which we are writing, Melrose flourished in all its pride, its influence, and its power. Upwards of two hundred monks of the Cistercian order peopled its cells—paced in its cloisters—swept in grand religious procession into the choir, beneath whose vaulted roofs the pealing organ sounded—or sat down at the long and well-spread tables in the refectory. A large and rich domain belonged to Melrose; and the Abbot exercised power as a temporal baron as well as a spiritual prelate. Though clad in his flowing robes, wearing a mitre upon his brow, and bearing a crozier in his hand when times of peace prevailed, yet if the message came across the Borders that the Southron ravagers were advancing, or the beacon-fires repeated on the Eildon hills the lurid warning sent from the Cheviot heights, then the Lord Abbot of Melrose would buckle on his armour, don the steel helmet, and grasp the spear and sword as well as any warlike feudal peer amongst his neighbours. Then too would the word be swiftly carried throughout the monastic domain that all the serfs and vassals bound to do service to their territorial lord, should muster at a given hour and in a stated place, and bearing provisions for forty days: so that the Southron invaders might be sure to encounter a serried human rampart on the confines of the Melrose lands.

Father Benedictus, the Lord Abbot of Melrose, at the time of which we are writing, was a man of some fifty-five years of age; and in his capacity as a temporal baron he was both feared and admired, in his quality of a spiritual ruler he was not the less loved and esteemed. For some fifteen

years had he held the crozier of the abbacy; and it was young at the age of forty to be elected to that high office. But Benedictus had given so many proofs of wisdom and valour in the trying times of war—his character was so resolute and decisive, his mental resources were so great, and he had attained by these qualities such an influence over his brethren in the monastery, that at the death of his aged and worn-out predecessor, he was unanimously elected to an office where energy was as much needed as piety. Over the earlier part of Father Benedictus' life a certain veil of mystery was spread. The other monks knew little or nothing of him prior to the time when upwards of thirty-five years back he had one day presented himself as a suppliant youth for admission into the holy pile. Some tale perhaps he told of the need or the motives which thus urged him at such an age to abandon the great world, but if so, the explanation was little regarded at the time and was quickly forgotten. Thus, absolutely nothing beyond the monastic life of Father Benedictus was known to his brethren in the Abbey; and these had long ceased to wonder who or what he might have been prior to his entrance amongst them. On his first admission he was employed as a page to the Lord Abbot of that day; then he was admitted into the body of the holy order itself—until eventually he became, as we have seen, the wearer of the proud mitre of Melrose.

It was in the evening of the day on which the incidents contained in the preceding chapter took place, that Father Benedictus was seated in his own private apartment. This was what may be termed of florid ecclesiastic architecture. The windows were high and narrow, with "slender shafts of shapely stone" separating the painted glass-work. The chisel of the sculptor had represented numerous flowers and plants with as much artistic delicacy as if they had been designed by the pencil. The mouldings of the cornices in the apartment delineated a similar tracery of foliage, interspersed with the tiny effigies of saints. The furniture of the room was rather simple than handsome—but massive and ponderous. Upon the table a repast of various dainties was spread; for it was considered no derogation to a becoming religious piety to banquet upon good fare within the walls of Melrose.

Father Benedictus had only just returned from a visit of a few days which he had been paying to the abbot of another monastery some forty miles distant. He had, therefore, performed a tolerably long journey on this particular day of which we are writing; and on his arrival at home he would fain have sat down to the recreations of the table without any more serious claims upon his attention. But he had found that his judicial intervention was needed in a most important case, and that there were guests at Melrose to whom his civilities must be shown. The worthy Abbot was therefore now just sitting down to partake of some hasty refreshment previous to addressing his attention to the matters to which we have alluded, and deciding upon the hour for the morrow when he should preside in the hall of justice.

But in the meanwhile the Lord Abbot bethought himself that while he was eating, and quaffing a cup of wine, he might just as well make certain inquiries and hear something more of the pending matters than he had gathered from the hurried information given him when he alighted, way-worn and wearied, in the court-yard of the monastery. He accordingly rang a little silver bell: a lay-brother entered to answer the summons; and the Lord Abbot desired that Father Cyrus might be sent to him.

In a few minutes Father Cyrus made his appearance, and bowed with becoming respect to his reverend superior.

"Be seated, my son," said the Abbot; "fill yourself a goblet—and give me some few details touching the matters which have thus suddenly been brought to press upon our attention. But in the first place answer me—are the Earl of Caithness and his party lodged in a seemly manner and cared for in a way which becomes the rank of that great chief?"

"Every attention, my lord, has been shown the Earl of Caithness and his party," responded Father Cyrus. "The nobleman himself, with his male retainers, occupies the apartments overlooking the cloister of the tombs: the ladies and their damsels are in the new building outside the gate."

"And the prisoner?" inquired the Abbot.

"I have retained him under my own special regard," rejoined Father Cyrus. "The youth rendered me a service —"

"Ah! then he is a youth?" said the Abbot, "and accused of this fearful crime! But in troth I lingered not ere now for details—I was weary and athirst, and methought I would for a brief space postpone all inquiries into the matter. But what may be the name of this obnoxious follower of the Earl of Caithness?"

"In sooth, my lord, he is no follower of the Earl, in the literal sense of the term," answered Father Cyrus. "He bears a knightly title —"

"All the worse," interjected the Abbot, "that foul suspicion, whether right or wrong, should have had scope to fall upon youthful chivalry."

"I have the fullest confidence, my lord," answered Father Cyrus, "that the result of the investigation will be to prove this young Knight's complete innocence. The Earl of Caithness—his lordship's daughter—her friend Margaret Fitz-Allan—"

"Ah!" ejaculated the Abbot: then instantaneously composing his features, he muttered to himself, "True! I might have known that she would be of the party—and Fleming no doubt likewise—for they are all just returning from France. Better that they had remained there! It is little short of madness—" then as a sudden idea struck the Abbot with a certain feeling of uneasiness, he turned towards Father Cyrus, exclaiming, "But you have not yet mentioned the name of this youthful prisoner whom to-morrow we must judge?"

"His style and name, my lord," replied the monk, "are Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan."

"What!" ejaculated the Abbot, with so sudden a start and with a look which became so dismayed that Father Cyrus was frightened. "Do you mean me to understand that Fleming Fitz-Allan is accused of this crime?"

"Alas, my lord, he is accused of it!" said the monk: "but so much magnanimity is incompatible with guilt! Your lordship looks unwell—"

"Not so, my son," observed the Abbot, proceeding to quaff his wine, either that the action might serve as a means of concealing his emotion, or that for some reason he needed its revivifying influence: "but I am to some little degree interested in that youth. You remember that when eight years back I chanced to halt at Roslin on my return from a visit to Edinburgh, I saw him—he was then a boy of twelve or thirteen —"

"And I recollect that your lordship proposed to the Earl of Caithness that the young Fitz-Allan should come hither, to be educated under your reverend auspices; but that the Earl unwisely and rudely rejected the well-meant proffer. This much I heard at the time—though I had not the honour of being with your lordship when you paid that

flying visit to Roslin: neither to my knowledge did I ever see Fleming Fitz-Allan before this day."

"You are right, Father Cyrus," said the Abbot, "in your recollection of what you heard with reference to my proposal to the Earl of Caithness touching the young Fitz-Allan, and the peremptory style amounting to rudeness in which his lordship declined the proffer. It was this circumstance which engendered a feeling of no very amicable nature betwixt Melrose and Roslin: and therefore I was all the more astonished when on my arrival ere now I learnt that the Earl of Caithness should be a visitor beneath the holy roof of the Abbey. He is however welcome!—yes, he is indeed welcome!" said the Abbot, repeating the words with a degree of fervour which struck Father Cyrus: "and pity 'tis that harsh words should have ever passed betwixt him and me!"

There was a brief pause, during which the Abbot seemed to be buried in profound reflection; and unconsciously a deep sadness came over his features, which were naturally pale and somewhat severe. But suddenly lifting his eyes, he exclaimed, "And so this Fleming Fitz-Allan has won knightly spurs?"

"He has, my lord. The *accolade* of chivalry," continued Father Cyrus, "was bestowed upon him, as I have heard, by the King of France himself."

"And has he grown up to be a comely youth?" inquired the Abbot: "for I remember that he gave promise of being such."

"None handsomer nor more comely, my lord," responded Father Cyrus. "As for his stoutness of heart, I can vouch for it: for he this day saved my life."

"Eh! is it so?" exclaimed the Abbot, with a look of supreme satisfaction. "And how was it?"

Father Cyrus at once related the incident of the mad bull,—with grateful fervour eulogizing the heroism of the young man towards whom he had conceived so strong a liking.

"It was well and bravely done!" said the Abbot. "Yes—truly, such a youth must be innocent of so foul a crime as that which malevolence or misrepresentation imputes to him! But tell me, my son, his sister—Margaret I think you called her—(and her also I remember to have seen some eight years back at Roslin Castle)—is she well-favoured as her brother?"

"There is doubtless many a knight, my lord," responded Father Cyrus, "who would be proud to wear the handsome Margaret Fitz-Allan's scarf over his steel corselet, or her glove attached to his lance, that in the tournament he might do battle as her champion and proclaim her to be peerless."

Again the Abbot reflected deeply for a few minutes; and then arousing from his reverie with the same abruptness as before, he demanded, "And where is the corpse of this foully murdered Knight of Liddesdale?"

"It is in the dead-house, my lord," responded Father Cyrus, "with tapers at head and foot, and Father Peter praying by the side. I gave him orders that none else was to enter the place,—seeing that to-morrow's judicial investigation will partake alike of the character of inquest and trial, and a corpse in such a case should remain as much as possible untouched, lest the opinion of a surgeon be needed relative to the immediate cause of death."

"You have done well, my son," said the Abbot. "But as for the innocence of this knightly youth, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan—"

"I am confident, my lord," responded Father Cyrus, "that you will to-morrow have the happi-

ness of conscientiously proclaiming the young man's innocence. The Earl of Caithness has no doubt upon the point!—Margaret is naturally vehement in her protestations on her brother's behalf!—the Lady Albertina Roslin, though by nature coy and timid, flushes with indignation at the bare idea that Fleming should be accused of such a deed! And then there is one whom I had hitherto forgotten to mention, and who arrived at the Abbey last night expressly to see your lordship—"

"Whom do you mean?" demanded the Abbot quickly. "I did indeed expect some one about this time, from foreign parts—"

"It is then doubtless the same, my lord," rejoined Father Cyrus; "a Teutonic Knight—"

"And he is here, beneath this roof?" ejaculated the Abbot, starting up from his chair. "Why was I not informed of this? It is precisely Sir Casimir D'Este whom I was expecting!"

"Your lordship has already admitted," answered the monk humbly, "that on alighting in the courtyard you listened so little to the details of what had recently passed—"

"True, true!" said the Abbot: "pardon my vivacity, my son! But Sir Casimir—"

"He knows not as yet of your lordship's return," replied Father Cyrus; "for to speak truly, I left him in the cell with young Fitz-Allan an hour ago—despite the peremptory message which the Black Douglas sent to the effect that the prisoner must be kept in strict seclusion. But Sir Casimir D'Este is so warm and generous in his friendship towards the young Knight—"

"Hasten, my son—hasten," said the Abbot, "and let Sir Casimir come hither at once! And mark you! Bring him to the door—then retire instantly—and see that no one approaches this room until I shall ring the bell to signify that I am again disengaged. See that you attend accurately, my son, to all these injunctions!"

Father Cyrus bowed respectfully, and withdrew. The instant the Lord Abbot of Melrose found himself alone, he threw himself on his knees before a niche containing a statue of the Virgin, to whom the Abbey was dedicated; and he prayed devoutly.

"I thank thee, O Sovereign Lady!—I thank thee, Blessed Virgin!" he said, "that thou hast brought him safely to this thine holy pile! Thou knowest how I have yearned for the moment when such meeting was to take place after long, long years of separation and severance!"

More in a similar strain did the devout Abbot say in his grateful outpourings; and then rising from his knees, he paced to and fro in the apartment,—his features working and his breast swelling with strong feelings, despite his endeavour to assume a certain degree of composure. Presently the door opened; and Sir Casimir D'Este—now attired in a plain undersuit, for he had completely divested himself of his armour—made his appearance. The door instantaneously closed behind him: but for a few moments both he and the Abbot remained motionless, as if by mutual tacit consent to assure themselves by the sounds of the retreating footsteps along the stone corridor, that Father Cyrus was retiring from the vicinage of the room. Yet what looks were those which the redoubtable knight and the mitred prelate bent during that interval upon each other!—looks which told of strong affections as strongly revived—looks that seemed fraught with memories of the past, and that were indicative of all the feelings of joy and delight at this meeting after a long separation and severance! Then, so soon as the footsteps of the retreating monk were no longer heard, that

dauntless knight and that mitred prelate flew into each other's arms.

"My brother! my beloved brother!" were the ejaculations, all tremulous with emotion, that burst forth from their lips.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BROTHERS.

It is not often that the circumstances of life engender emotions at once so strong, so tender, and so melting on the part of men of mature years, as those which now filled the souls of the mitred Abbot and the puissant Knight. Yet so it was in this case; and that prelate whose hair was whitening beneath the influence of fifty-five years, and that warrior whose existence had reached its fortieth summer, wept in each other's arms as if they were children. At length, when the first gush of feelings was over, they sat down: yet still they could not immediately settle their minds to deliberate discourse—but they gazed upon each other, not merely with regards of fraternal affection, but likewise as if to make mutual observation of the effect which the long lapse of years had produced upon one another.

"Thou wast a comely youth of sixteen when I last beheld thee!" thought the Abbot of Melrose as he thus contemplated the Knight's countenance.

"And twenty-four years back, when I bade thee farewell on leaving my native land to seek my fortunes in a foreign clime," thought the Teutonic Knight on his own side, "thou, my brother, wast a fine handsome man of thirty-one, looking more like a warrior than a priest, although even *then* years had elapsed since thou hadst adopted the cowl and the rosary of the monk!"

Such were the thoughts which respectively passed through the minds of the two brothers during this mute but earnest survey of each other's countenance; and each of them comprehended more or less what the other was saying within himself.

"Yes—time has indeed altered us, my dear brother," said the Abbot, now speaking audibly: "but if in its progress it hath left its traces upon our features and our forms, it hath used us not indifferently in respect of worldly things. For when we separated twenty-four long years ago, I was a humble friar in this monastery over which I now rule with lordly power; and you were then content to follow, in the humble capacity of a page, the fortunes of a German Knight! Now we meet, I as the mitred Abbot of the proud domain of Melrose; and you—"

"Yes, brother," interrupted the Teutonic Knight; "fortune has to a great extent indemnified us for the sorrows and sufferings of our earlier years. Through many vicissitudes and adventures have I passed; and it was not in idleness or inactivity that the best years of my life traced their way—otherwise never should I have reached my present position! You must have deemed me an ingrate, my dear brother, that for so many long years I ceased to communicate with you: but, as you are already aware, the report reached me of your death shortly after I went abroad—and I have prayed for you and I have wept for you as for one dead! You may therefore conceive with what joy I was inspired when some few weeks ago I received your letter, guardedly putting the inquiry whether I, bearing another name, was the same who twenty-four years back had left my native Scottish land as a humble and obscure youth of sixteen, glad to eat the bread of servitude, and with naught but a sword by my side as the

means of carving out a career of fortune? Yes, my brother, it was a most enthusiastic joy which I experienced on receiving that letter!—a twofold delight, first to find you were living when I had so long deemed you dead, and second to learn that the mitre of a prelate rested upon your brow!"

"And you may believe me likewise, my brother," responded the Abbot, "that lively were the emotions excited within me when some few weeks ago a traveller from Germany, happening to seek the hospitality of Melrose, casually dropped some words of discourse which led me to question him more closely; and his replies to those questions encouraged the belief that the beloved brother of whom I had not heard for so many long, long years might possibly be identical with him of whom that German wanderer spoke. Yet, as there was still no certitude on that point, it was with infinite suspense that I awaited the reply to the letter which I sent you: but when your response came—when with trembling hands I had opened the billet, and at the first glance my eyes beheld those words which put an end to all suspense and cleared up every doubt—I fell upon my knees and prayed with perhaps greater fervour and thankfulness than ever I had prayed before!"

"And then you lost no time in sending me another letter," resumed the Teutonic Knight; "and I saw by the haste which you thus made to communicate with me again, as well as by the terms of the letter itself, that you yearned to embrace me. That fraternal feeling was as sincerely reciprocated; and the moment when I ere now held you in my arms, was one of the happiest which I have known throughout my adventurous and stormy life! But alas! my dear brother, that letter to which I have just alluded, produced its pain as well as its pleasure: for it made me acquainted for the first time with the sad death of our unfortunate eldest brother many years ago!"—and then, after a brief pause, during which two tears trickled slowly down the cheeks of the warrior, he asked in a low tone, "And was it indeed certified beyond the possibility of doubt that our brother John put a period to his existence with the hand of a distracted suicide?"

"Alas, it is but too true!" responded the Abbot, reverentially making the sign of the cross: and then in silence he for a few moments breathed a prayer for the welfare of the suicide brother's soul.

"And how happened it?" inquired Sir Casimir D'Este: "how came this deplorable catastrophe to pass?"

"I need scarcely remind you," continued the Abbot of Melrose, "that at the time when you left Scotland exactly twenty-four years back, our eldest brother was in London awaiting the issue of the war then raging between the two countries, and entertaining the hope that England would prevail in the strife, so that he might through Southron power and intervention obtain the restoration of his estates in his native Caledon. But suddenly the war terminated, and King David was placed upon the Scottish throne. All hope that the ban would be lifted from our family was then destroyed; for David Bruce was by no means likely to revoke the decrees which the Black Parliament passed at the dictation of his father Robert Bruce. A couple of years went by after the sudden cessation of that war, and our brother John married a young Englishwoman whose beauty and whose virtues were her only dower. In due time a son was born unto them. Two years later a daughter was ushered into the world; but the birth of this second child cost the life of the mother. Our unhappy brother was thus left a widower, with two young children; and dire penury seemed to be their insurmountable fate.



No. 4.—MARGARET.

Few and far between were the letters which I received from our brother; and slender was the assistance that at the time I was occasionally enabled to remit him. At length, rendered desperate by the position of his affairs, he was determined to take some decisive step for his children's sake; and he accordingly came secretly to Scotland. There was a nobleman on whom the circumstances of earlier years had given him some claim; and at this nobleman's castle he found an asylum, with his two little children. Through the nobleman's influence certain powerful friends interceded with King David on behalf of a family suffering through no misdeed of their own but through the crime of an ancestor: but alas! their interposition was vain—the King vowed that the decrees of the Black Parliament, passed in the time of his father, must remain inexorable! Maddened by a sense of the foul injustice to which he was thus rendered a victim, our unhappy brother put a period to his existence!"

"And his poor children," asked Sir Casimir hastily,—“what became of them?”

"My dear brother," replied the Abbot, in a tone where solemnity and feeling were mingled, "the voice of nature must have assuredly spoken when you were led to experience an interest in that unfortunate youth—innocent I am convinced, though unfortunate—who is now accused of murder!"

"Good heavens!" burst from the lips of Sir Casimir D'Este, as a light suddenly flashed in upon his mind. "It was, then, the Earl of Caithness who was the nobleman that befriended our unfortunate brother!—and in the persons of Fleming and Margaret Fitz-Allan I have already become acquainted with my nephew and niece?"

"It is even so," answered the Abbot. "The Earl of Caithness behaved well to our deceased brother, and has acted most generously towards his orphan children."

"Then the Earl is aware of your real name?" cried Sir Casimir: "he knows who you are?"

"Not so," rejoined the Abbot. "When our unfortunate brother John was at Roslin Castle, he and I met frequently—but it was in secret; and on each occasion he vehemently enjoined me to do naught that should compromise my own safety; for had it been known that I belonged to the family suffering under the eternal ban of the Black Parliament, not even Melrose itself might have continued to serve as a sanctuary for my protection. Thus the Earl of Caithness has ever remained ignorant of the kinship which subsisted between his unfortunate guest and myself,—ignorant likewise of the relationship which I bear to his orphan charges Fleming and Margaret."

"And the Earl must likewise remain ignorant of my kinship with them," said the Teutonic Knight; "and alas! prudence requires that they themselves should know me only as a friend, and not as a kinsman. But Ah! now I bethink me—exists there not some matter of dispute betwixt the Earl and yourself?"

"To my sorrow," replied the Abbot of Melrose, "am I compelled to answer in the affirmative. Yet assuredly the fault was little ascribable to me. The misunderstanding can be explained in a few words. Being naturally anxious for the welfare of my nephew and niece I thought that I might at least provide for one of them:—I allude to Fleming. I wished to render him independent of the Earl's bread which he was eating; and I offered to receive him into the Abbey that he might be educated under my auspices. The mitre already rested upon my brow; and I calculated in my mind that if Fleming were once within these walls, I might so

tutor him as to embrace a monastic life; and I entertained visions of greatness on his behalf—for I said to myself, 'Who knows but that with heaven's blessing I may so direct the course of circumstances as in due time to obtain the consent of the Chapter that I should resign the crozier of Melrose into his hand?'—With such prophetic hopes as these, I made my proffer to the Earl of Caithness. Utterly ignorant that it was the uncle interesting himself on behalf of the nephew, the Earl beheld in me naught but a wily churchman seeking to draw away into the cloister a youth who by his fiery spirit had already, even at the age of twelve, manifested inclinations for the turmoil and bustle of an active worldly life. Thus the Earl of Caithness spoke haughtily and angrily; and he tauntingly replied that no one who owned his influence should ever resign the sword for the rosary or the hauberk for the cowl. Anxious to gain my point, I perhaps argued the case with an earnestness which savoured of passion, and which passion the Earl could not possibly understand; so that higher words ensued—and hence the coolness which was engendered betwixt Roslin and Melrose."

"And now that circumstances have brought the Earl of Caithness beneath this roof," said the Teutonic Knight, "you will extend the hand of friendship?"

"My dear brother," interjected the Abbot solemnly, "the finger of providence is visible in many incidents of recent occurrence. Do not think it was accident alone which rendered you a fellow-traveller with the Earl of Caithness and his party:—it was a providential intent to make you acquainted with your youthful kinsfolks, that you might appreciate their good qualities even before their relationship was revealed unto you. It was heaven's decree likewise that circumstances should so progress as to render me the judge in this accusation which has risen against our beloved nephew; and I am inspired with the fullest confidence that his guiltlessness of the foul deed will be rendered completely apparent. It was equally providential that these same circumstances should constrain as it were the Earl of Caithness to make a temporary sojourn at Melrose, in order that I might by the display of all kindnesses and hospitalities repair the breach that eight years ago occurred betwixt us."

"Tell me, my dear brother," inquired Sir Casimir, in a mournful voice, "are these orphans acquainted with the secret of their birth and with their sire's unhappy fate?"

"You will see, by a little consideration of all circumstances," responded the Abbot, "that I cannot possibly be in a condition to answer this query with any degree of certitude, inasmuch as no syllable upon the subject has ever passed betwixt the Earl of Caithness and myself. Indeed, for seven years past the Earl has been altogether abroad. But still I can form certain conjectures on the point relative to which you have questioned me. I have already told you that when our unfortunate brother was a sojourner, under the feigned name of Fitz-Allan, at Roslin Castle some seventeen years back, I had frequent secret interviews with him. I however saw him but once after the failure of the exertions which had been made by friends to obtain the royal repeal of the decrees of the Black Parliament. He was then deeply desponding; and he assured me his conviction was that he had not long to live. He told me that he had spoken in a similar strain to the Earl of Caithness, and that the Earl had promised, whatever might happen, to perform the part of a friend and protector unto his two children. Our poor brother likewise informed me that having this conviction of approaching death, he had be-

sought the Earl to wait until Fleming and Margaret should reach years of discretion ere the sad tale of their family misfortunes should be made known to them. It was shortly after the interview in which our poor brother told me all these things, that he laid violent hands upon himself. The Earl of Caithness has ever been kind, generous, and considerate towards the orphans; and it is not therefore probable that he has departed from the injunctions of their unhappy father. It is thus reasonable to conjecture that our nephew and niece have only recently learnt the secret of their birth, even if it has yet been communicated to them at all."

"My belief in Fleming's innocence of the foul crime imputed to him," said the Teutonic Knight, after a long pause, during which he reflected profoundly, "has been strong from the very first. That innocence will be made manifest; and he has a brilliant career before him. Already the wearer of the golden spurs of chivalry, and doubtless destined to wed the Earl's daughter—"

"Not so, my brother," interrupted the Abbot of Melrose; "for it is confidently reported in well-informed quarters that the return of Lord Caithness to his Castle of Roslin is to be speedily followed by the bridal of the Lady Albertina and the young Earl of Bassentyne."

"Ah! say you so?" exclaimed Sir Casimir D'Este; and a shade came over his countenance. "Here, then, is the unfortunate element of fresh complications for the future; because full certain am I from the glances which I beheld pass between them, that the hearts of Fleming and Albertina are bound by the silken chains of love."

At this moment footsteps were heard advancing along the stone corridor leading to the apartment; and the Abbot, starting somewhat angrily from his seat, muttered, "What means this intrusion after the positive orders which I gave that I was not to be disturbed?"

There was a hasty knock at the door; and without waiting to be bidden to enter, Father Cyrus rushed in, exclaiming, "Pardon me, my lord—forgive this disobedience of your mandate—but something so extraordinary has just occurred—"

Father Cyrus stopped short, and glanced at the Teutonic Knight, as much as to imply that he could not speak in a stranger's presence.

"Proceed, my son," said the Abbot; "hesitate not to continue your statement: for Sir Casimir D'Este is a worthy Knight who has ears only for that which concerns him."

Father Cyrus—whose countenance expressed a strange blending of consternation, wonderment, horror, and joy—bowed reverentially to the Lord Abbot; and then, having carefully closed the door, which on his hasty entrance he had left open, he commenced the revelation of the extraordinary circumstance which had led to his abrupt intrusion. But what this was, we must at present leave untold, inasmuch as it will more appropriately fit itself into a future chapter of our narrative.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIAL.

THE day had been remarkably fine: but the sun had set with an angry aspect, and darkness closed in with all the portents of a coming storm. Huge black clouds had piled themselves upon the face of heaven, apparently descending lower and lower towards the earth as they added to their dense vapour fabric. While the two brothers were still

in the midst of their conversation large drops of rain began to fall through the heavy atmosphere. There was a perfect stillness in the air—the rain soon ceased—and the sultriness grew oppressive.

In those times when the real nature of the storm was but imperfectly known to the human comprehension—and when the causes of the thunder-voice in which nature occasionally spoke, and of the vivid lightning which vibrated through the spheres, were as sealed books except to a few men of science—it naturally seemed ominous that the hour of such solemn awe should be chosen for the investigation of a deed of murder. Yet so it was. For all of a sudden the mandate went forth throughout the spacious monastic establishment, that the Lord Abbot would with the least possible delay take cognizance of the mysterious affair. Messages were accordingly despatched to Closeburn Tower in the immediate neighbourhood, to the effect that Father Benedictus would presently preside in the judgment-hall, and that the presence of the Earl of Douglas with his witnesses was therefore summarily required.

The Lord Abbot proceeded in person to the apartment which had been assigned to the Earl of Caithness; and on entering that room, where the Earl was seated alone, the prelate gave the usual benediction, at the same time extending his hand and saying in a kind voice, "Welcome, my lord, to Melrose."

The generous-hearted Earl warmly pressed that proffered hand; and without verbally alluding to the past, he conveyed by this fervid pressure an intimation of complete reconciliation.

"It is my purpose, my lord," said the Abbot, "to hold an immediate court of inquest and trial in this most lamentable case which demands my cognizance. I have no doubt your lordship will be pleased that there should be no tarrying in the matter."

"The innocence of a guiltless person," replied the Earl, "can never be too speedily made manifest; and to this end am I confident that your reverend lordship's wise investigation will take its course."

"It is not for me, my son," rejoined the Abbot, "to pronounce an opinion before-hand in so grave a case: but this much I may assure your lordship, that the sternest and most impartial justice shall be done."

"Such assurance is unnecessary from the lips of the Lord Abbot of Melrose," replied the Earl of Caithness. "Has the Douglas been summoned to attend?"

"Messengers have departed to announce my intention to hear the case forthwith," answered the Abbot. "Doubtless it suits your lordship's intention to be present likewise at the proceedings?"

"Not for worlds would I be absent!" exclaimed the nobleman: "not for worlds could I even have the appearance of withdrawing my countenance from this youth whom I know to be incapable of so foul a deed!"

"Your lordship shall be duly summoned," rejoined the Abbot, "when the preparations are completed. There is one little circumstance which I should mention—and this is, that inasmuch as the Earl of Douglas, exercising his right as a prosecutor, so to speak, sent a message to Melrose to insist that Fleming Fitz-Allan should be in all respects treated as a prisoner accused of a felon's deed—"

"Ah! this was not well done on the part of the Earl of Douglas!" exclaimed Lord Caithness; "for he had my pledge that Fleming should be forthcoming at the proper time."

"You see, my lord," continued the Abbot, "that

as an impartial administrator of the law within the domain of Melrose, I am held bound to bend to the requisition of the Earl of Douglas. Therefore it must in no sense be considered offensive to your lordship personally if the accused be led into the justice-hall under the circumstances befitting a prisoner."

"I understand you, holy father," responded the Earl, in a voice of solemn mournfulness: "the youth whom I love must wear the felon's manacles? But oh! rest assured that the chains will be stricken off him, and that from your lips, holy father, will ere long go forth the mandate to restore him in all honour to his friends. It is a deed of darkness which I trust your lordship's wisdom will be enabled to penetrate. Ah! behold that vivid flash of lightning!" ejaculated the Earl, as the blinding glare suddenly and for a moment made the apartment seem as if it were in a blaze; "and mark too that rolling peal of thunder! It appears as if heaven were lending its own light for the elucidation of this fearful mystery, and as if that same heaven's own portentous voice were calling upon the guilty one to stand forth."

"Amen!" said the Lord Abbot solemnly: and he then issued from the room.

In the meanwhile Father Cyrus had proceeded to the cell in which our young hero was lodged; and on entering, he said in accents that were grave yet cheering, "The hour is approaching, my son, when that innocence which you have all along proclaimed may be made manifest, if ever in this world it shall be shown!"

"I am to understand therefore," said Sir Fleming, "that the Lord Abbot purposes to hold his judicial court this night?"

"It is even so," responded the monk. "You will be called upon, my son, to name a friend to appear as an adviser and advocate on your behalf. Hesitate not to summon me: for never can I forget that I owe you my life!"

"With gratitude do I accept your proffer, holy father," rejoined Fitz-Allan.

The monk now appeared anxious to say something more—but still he hesitated: and then, as if suddenly coming to a resolution, he produced a chain from beneath his garments, and said, "Hold this in your hands, my son, and let the form and ceremony be fulfilled according to the stern requirement of the Douglas. It is not I who will subject you to the outrage of fastening the manacles upon your wrists!"

"Nor will I even hold the felon's emblems!" exclaimed Fitz-Allan, as he indignantly dashed the chain upon the stone floor of the cell, while the hot blood mantled upon his cheeks.

"My son," said Father Cyrus, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "methought that you would do my bidding, and that you would accept the compromise which in a friendly spirit I proffered. Consider! the fierce Douglas with his retainers will be here anon; and they may perforce compel you to bear upon your wrists that which I simply ask you to carry in your hands. The Saviour bore his own cross; and his spirit went up from it to the glory of his Father. That same heavenly Father may likewise lift you high up above the ignominy of this earthly emblem of shame!"

At that moment the lightning flashed vividly through the narrow window of the cell; and the thunder, immediately following, rolled with the crashing din of countless reverberations through the spacious pile of Melrose. Father Cyrus crossed himself: the youthful prisoner remained silent and transfixed with solemn awe for a few moments; and then, catching up the chain, he

said, "So far from being terrified by the glare and the voice of the storm, I accept these signs as tokens that heaven is interposing in my behalf!"

"Amen!" said Father Cyrus, with an utterance as solemn in the prisoner's cell as the Lord Abbot was at the same moment speaking the word in the apartment of the Earl of Caithness.

The holy father then quitted the captive for awhile; and in a short time the gates of the monastery were thrown open to give admittance to the Earl of Douglas and some twenty of his retainers. That great and powerful nobleman was about five-and-forty years of age: but his dark hair had as yet experienced not the influence of time—it showed not the slightest tendency to change from its sable hue. His eyes were also dark, and full of a fierce fire. His complexion was swarthy; and he was generally known as the Black Douglas. In person he was tall and powerfully formed. His disposition was fierce, his temper hot, his courage dauntless. He was now sheathed in complete armour: but his visor was raised; and by the light of the torches in the court-yard, his swarthy countenance had a more than usually sinister aspect, enframed as it was by the polished steel of the casque that reflected the lurid glare of those waving lights. He was closely attended by Magnus Balveny; and in the midst of his retainers were the landlord of the Unicorn and the two squires of the Knight of Liddesdale—those three persons being needed as witnesses for what may be termed the side of the prosecution.

Having alighted from their steeds, the Earl of Douglas and his followers were conducted towards the cloister of the Chapter House, which with all possible haste had been fitted up as a court of justice. But though scarcely a couple of hours had now elapsed since the Lord Abbot had issued his mandate for the judicial proceedings to take place that night, the arrangements were perfected in due time, there being numerous lay-brothers, pages, and menial retainers in the monastic establishment to do the needful work. Thus, at the upper end of the Chapter House, a dais or platform was erected to support the seat of the Lord Abbot; while numerous chairs and benches were ranged in rows in the body of the hall for the accommodation of the spectators. On each side of the dais was a low-arched door,—one communicating with some of the cells of the monastery, and the other leading into a corridor at the extremity of which was the dead-house, where the body of the Knight of Liddesdale had been deposited. A seat for the witnesses was in the neighbourhood of the first-mentioned door. The high portals at the farther extremity of the Chapter House stood wide open, to give admission to those who were to be present at the proceedings.

It was eleven o'clock at night when several torch-bearers, heading a long procession, entered the Chapter House by the huge portals; and they moved slowly towards the dais. There were already some tapers lighted in the hall: but these threw out very feeble gleams;—and moreover it was considered in those times that the lurid glare of torches gave a more solemn and awe-inspiring character to such proceedings when taking place in a monastic establishment. The torch-bearers were followed by a long procession of monks in their Cistercian garb; and in the midst were the crosses and the silver spears which were borne in front of the Lord Abbot himself. On approaching the dais, the monks formed themselves into two lines, between which their reverend superior passed, carrying his crozier, to the judicial seat, in which he placed himself. The torch-bearers remained near

the dais: the procession of two hundred monks glided noiselessly into the rows of seats appointed for their occupation. Then the lay-brothers entered and placed themselves behind the monks.

Now along the stone cloisters leading to the tall portals of the Chapter House, came the sounds of armed men's heavy footsteps, mingled with the clanking of weapons. The Earl of Douglas, in his capacity of prosecutor on behalf of his kinsman the Knight of Liddesdale, took precedence on this occasion of the Earl of Caithness, who merely stood in the light of a spectator, or else in that of a witness if he had any testimony to give. Thus, it was now the Black Douglas and his party who were entering the hall. For the same reason which temporarily established a difference between the rights of precedence of the two Earls, who were in other respects equal in point of rank and consequence, the Lord of Douglas was accommodated with a seat next to the Abbot upon the dais. Magnus Balveny, having marshalled the fierce Borderers to their seats behind the lay-brethren, proceeded to the bench to be occupied by the witnesses, as above stated. And now the Earl of Caithness, attended by his followers—and Sir Casimir D'Este, waited upon by his faithful squire Jassent, passed through the open portals and entered the hall. The Earl had not deemed it expedient to request even that his daughter or Margaret should be present at the proceedings; while indeed it was contrary to the rules of the establishment that any females should pass within its cloistral boundaries. The Earl and the Teutonic Knight were conducted to chairs placed in front of the seats occupied by the monks: their followers were shown to a side bench so that they might be apart from the immediate vicinage of the fierce Borderers of the Douglas. Young Seton, the landlord, and the other witnesses, proceeded to occupy their special bench.

The scene which the Chapter House now presented was a motley but a solemn and awe-inspiring one. The emblems of warfare mingled with those of religion: the robes of the Abbot were in contrast with the bright steel armour of the Earl upon the dais: the gowns of the monks seemed strange in juxtaposition with the warlike garb of the Borderers. The ruddy glare of the torches was reflected by silver crosses as well as by steel helmets and corselets. The crozier in the hand of the Abbot was symbolic of far different things from those which were typified by the ponderous sword suspended to the waist of the Douglas.

Meanwhile the storm had reached its height: the lightning was flashing at short intervals through the high narrow windows of the Chapter House—and the thunder was rolling in loud peals, sending its reverberations through the long cloisters, and roaring with additional din beneath the high vaulted roofs of the Abbey-church itself. It was altogether a scene, with that large assemblage of priests and warriors—with that lurid glare of torches—with that frequent playing of the vivid lightning—and with that awful roll of the thunder,—it was altogether a scene, we say, full well calculated to produce an effect of the most solemn and terrible kind upon the guilty soul.

And now the proceedings commenced. The Lord Abbot rose and offered up a brief but impressive prayer, invoking heaven to sustain and guide him throughout his solemn duties: and when it was terminated, the monks in solemn chorus chanted the "Amen." Then for a few moments a dead silence reigned,—until it was broken by the Lord Abbot saying, in a loud voice, "Let the prisoner be introduced."

A bell was heard to ring somewhere in the adja-

cent buildings; and the door which we have already described as communicating with a portion of the cells, speedily opened. Father Cyrus appeared, followed by four lay-brothers, with Fleming Fitz-Allan in their midst. He was dressed in his travelling-suit, which fitting tight to his figure, displayed all the symmetry of the shape to its fullest advantage. His face was pale: but the firmness and confidence of innocence seemed to be in its expression,—an air of honest resoluteness, conscience-clear, but without bravado. He carried in his hands the chain in such a manner that it was impossible to see that the rings were not properly fastened upon his wrists.

Whatever emotions the Lord Abbot might have experienced on thus beholding his beloved nephew in so ignominious a plight, he betrayed them not: but his countenance was grave and severe. His voice too was firm as he demanded, "Prisoner, what are your names, style, and calling?"

"The names that I bear, my lord," replied our hero, in unfaltering tone but with respectful demeanour, "are Fleming Fitz-Allan; and my style is that of Knight of the Order of St. Michael of France."

"Who accuses Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan?" demanded the Abbot; "and of what crime is he accused?"

Then rose the Douglas from his seat, drawing himself up to the full of his towering height, all sheathed in armour as he was; and in a loud voice, he said, "I, Earl and Baron of Douglas, proclaim Fleming Fitz-Allan to be guilty of the crime of murder. And I do furthermore accuse him of foully assassinating my beloved and revered kinsman, Sir William Douglas, Knight of Liddesdale and of Hermitage."

"How say you, Fleming Fitz-Allan?" asked the Abbot, when the Earl of Douglas had resumed his seat;—"Guilty or not guilty of the crime thus imputed to you?"

"Not guilty, my lord," was the answer given in a tone so firm and clear that it might have been heard beneath the cloisters outside the Chapter House.

But scarcely had those brief words ceased to vibrate upon the ears of the listeners, when the lightning flashed vividly through the windows of the judgment-hall, absorbing for a moment the very glare of the torches in its stupendous blinding blaze; and then the thunder rolled and roared, and crashed and vibrated throughout the entire edifice, as if it were not on the occasion of a scene of man's puny judgment, but on that of the far more awful presence of the Day of Judgment itself.

When the thunder died away, a solemn silence ensued for a few moments, during which the minds of many present were agitated with the bewildering conjecture whether the sudden play of the lightning and the outburst of the thunder following so closely upon our hero's plea, might be regarded as a ratification of its truth or as heaven's own angry proclaiming of its falsehood.

"Do you claim the assistance," asked the Abbot again breaking the solemn pause, "of any advocate or assessor in the pending trial?"

"I do, my lord," responded Fleming. "I desire that I may be assisted by such countenance and counsel as the holy Father Cyrus may under circumstances deem himself justified in affording."

Thereupon Father Cyrus, who had remained standing at a little distance, stepped forward, and with a low reverence to the Abbot, he said, "I accept the office."

"Tis well, my son" responded the Abbot. "We will now proceed—"

"With all humility and deference, my lord," interrupted Father Cyrus, "I would at once state that I have it in my power to summon a witness who can not merely throw the most important light upon a transaction hitherto so mysterious —"

"But first of all," exclaimed the Earl of Douglas fiercely, "the case must be properly laid before the reverend judge."

"My lord," interjected the Abbot firmly, "it is for me to decide in which order I will receive the witnesses. Father Cyrus is an honourable and an intelligent man; and I may trust much to his discretion and good sense in the present case."

"I can assure your lordship," answered the monk, "that I will take no step which shall unnecessarily delay these proceedings. On the contrary, the witness whom I propose to call —"

"We will have no perjurers nor forswearers here!" vociferated the Earl of Douglas.

"Peace, my lord!" exclaimed the Abbot with a dignified firmness. "I command you, by virtue of my judicial as well as my holy office, to submit to the discipline of this solemn tribunal."

"Then be it so, my lord," said the Douglas haughtily.

"Father Cyrus," continued the Abbot, "bring forward your testimony. Who is this witness that you intend to call?"

The lightning flashed at the moment—the Chapter House seemed to be in a blaze; and then the thunder rolled and reverberated again throughout the entire edifice.

"Whom do you purpose to call?" inquired the Abbot, as the din died away and the torches seemed to burn comparatively dim and obscure after that blinding glare.

Then Father Cyrus, raising his voice to its loudest tone, exclaimed, "The witness whom I summon is the Knight of Liddesdale himself! Sir William Douglas, come forth!"

It would be impossible to describe the scene of wonder, suspense, and consternation which now followed, when, as another vivid flash of lightning vanished away, and just at the instant that the thunder was rolling, roaring, and crashing beneath the vaulted roof of the judgment-hall, the door communicating with the dead-house was thrown open; and the Knight of Liddesdale, with ghastly countenance and dressed in the garments of the grave, made his appearance upon the threshold.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHALLENGE.

THE appearance of such a figure at such a moment had a ghastly and awful effect. While the storm was raging without, and heaven's anger seemed to be proclaiming itself with the blaze of the lightning and the roar of the thunder—and when within the building human minds were full of agitation and suspense—there, into the midst of that scene, burst one who looked like an apparition from the dead. And inasmuch as the fearful word *murder* was already ringing in every ear, and the ruddy glare of the torches had seemed to be illuminating as it were a blood-mist,—while all such associations as these, we say, were present to the fancy, it almost seemed as if every tragic circumstance should have combined to enhance the melodramatic effect with which the ghastly apparition thus burst upon the view.

We should here observe that four persons only had been previously cognizant of the resurrection

of the Knight of Liddesdale: these were the Lord Abbot, Sir Casimir D'Este, Father Cyrus, and Father Peter. Thus, upon all the rest of the assemblage did the spectacle produce its effects more or less varied and startling according to dispositions and circumstances. The astonishment which seized upon Fleming Fitz-Allan was speedily mingled with joy; while the Earl of Caithness, so soon as he recovered from the first shock of bewilderment, gave vent to a tervid ejaculation, and grasping Sir Casimir D'Este's hand, murmured in accents of deep devotion, "The Blessed Virgin be thanked! everything must now be cleared up!"

All the monks crossed themselves piously and began telling their beads; and amongst them there were a few who believing that it was really an apparition from the dead, sank upon their knees. As for the Earl of Douglas, who sat upon the dais, he appeared to be for an instant stricken in a manner which scarcely admits of description; for his swarthy countenance became ghastly—he half started from his chair—he endeavoured to speak—but in silence he sank down again. On the bench of the witnesses there seemed likewise to be feelings as conflicting as those which prevailed amongst the rest of the assemblage: for while young Seton was inspired with the liveliest joy (as he was all along convinced of his master's innocence), the two Squires of the Knight of Liddesdale scarcely dared give way to their own delight on account of a feeling of superstitious dread—the landlord looked on in stolid wonderment—and Magnus Balveny seemed to be affected in precisely the same sense as his master the Black Douglas upon the dais.

But during the time which it has occupied us to give this sketch, rapid and imperfect though it be, of the various emotions conjured up by the sudden appearance of Sir William Douglas of Liddesdale, events were progressing in the Chapter House. There was a solemn pause for nearly a minute after the supposed victim of assassination revealed himself as the ghastly possessor of life and breath; and then that ominous, that awful silence was broken by the voice of Father Cyrus exclaiming, "Behold, my lord! the witness has answered my summons!"

"Yes—I am here," said the Knight of Liddesdale, whose voice, though low and feeble, was yet clearly audible; and his white hair and beard seemed to be streaming like a meteor, while the glare of the torch-light was reflected fearfully in the eyes that were half glazed with the recent death-like trance: "I am here to proclaim to this assemblage and to the world as foul a deed as ever disgraced humanity!"

"Speak then, Knight of Liddesdale!" exclaimed the Lord Abbot, in a tone of solemn adjuration: "speak, and say—was the accused youth guilty of the crime of attempted assassination?"

"No!" responded the ghastly witness, his voice acquiring power for the enunciation of the denial. "On my soul and before God he was innocent of that crime!"

The words were still vibrating through the spacious Chapter House, when the lightning again blazed in with vivid glare; and then the thunder pealed through the entire edifice of Melrose with a din so awful that even the boldest heart was smitten with awe—for it seemed as if the stupendous pile, shaken to its very foundation, must fall crashing in and burying its inmates in a general destruction. At the same time there was a clang of a chain upon the stone pavement of the hall; and at the moment when the thunder was dying growlingly away in the distance, Father Cyrus exclaimed in a loud but solemn voice, "Behold!

the prisoner is free!—the manacles have fallen from his hands!"

"A miracle! a miracle!" murmured the numerous monks, as they crossed themselves devoutly: and besides the holy brotherhood there were many others present who were also impressed with the superstitious belief that the chain had fallen of its own accord—or rather, we should say, had been stricken off by heaven's invisible hand: for none save Sir Fleming himself, the Abbot, Father Cyrus, and Sir Casimir D'Este, knew that the manacles had never been fastened at all, but had merely been carried loosely in the hands.

Our youthful hero had no inclination on such an occasion, nor amidst the joy of his own complete acquittal, to say a word that might afford the natural explanation for an incident to which Father Cyrus, with the Abbot's full connivance, chose to give a miraculous complexion. But hastening to the spot where the Earl of Caithness and Sir Casimir D'Este were seated, he was warmly congratulated and affectionately embraced by them both. Then he grasped the hand of the faithful Seton, who had likewise sped thither; and in tones of exultant joy he said to the youth, "Hasten and bear this happy intelligence to my sister and the Lady Albertina!"

All the incidents which we have detailed occurred far more rapidly than it is possible for words to convey the idea, because as yet only a few minutes had in reality elapsed since the appearance of the Knight of Liddesdale in that hall. But already amongst the great mass of the assemblage the bewildering question was being mentally asked—"Who, since Sir Fleming is innocent, *can* the guilty assassin be?"

"Knight of Liddesdale," said the Lord Abbot of Melrose, again in a voice of solemn adjuration, "you have pronounced the accused to be innocent, and heaven itself has ratified your words. Whom, then, do you accuse as guilty?"

For a moment there was an awe-felt, almost fearful silence of suspense—hearts themselves appeared to have ceased to beat with the suspended breath—and straining eyes were fixed upon the ghastly death-like spectacle of the Knight in the garments of the grave. Slowly raising one arm as if with the intent of pointing with ominous finger to the guilty individual who was present, the Knight of Liddesdale said in a voice which though hollow, was nevertheless powerful, "I accuse of this most foul crime—I charge with this most unnatural and un-knightly deed—the man who sits *there*!"—here the outstretched finger pointed towards the culprit alluded to,—"my own kinsman, the false Earl of Douglas!"

"A truce to such vile jugglery as this!" exclaimed the Earl, starting up to his feet. "My poor kinsman raves!—he knows not what he says—he repeats words that have been put into his mouth by treacherous priests!"

But now again flashed in the blinding lightning; and the glittering casque of the Earl of Douglas enframed a countenance that was absolutely hideous in its ghastly swarthythiness. Then the thunder burst as if just above the very roof of the Chapter House itself; and the landlord of the Unicorn, as he devoutly crossed his breast, felt the form of Magnus Balveny quivering like an aspen leaf by his side. He glanced at Balveny's countenance, and his regards were shudderingly withdrawn—for the conscious guilt of the trembling criminal was depicted as plainly upon the haggard distorted features as if it were printed in a book!

"My lord," said the Abbot of Melrose, addressing himself, as the pealing thunder rolled away, to

the Earl of Douglas,—"heaven is giving its own testimony with signal effect against you!"

"Such language as this," vociferated the Earl fiercely, "might serve to work its impression on the silly and superstitious mind: but the soul of the Douglas is not thus to be overawed! The storm rages elsewhere as well as here——"

"And the innocent mind," said the Abbot with solemn impressiveness, "bows and trembles, while it also has hope and faith!"

"If my kinsman," said the Knight of Liddesdale, "choose to shut his eyes and ears to the portents of heaven, let the tribunal descend to earthly facts: and of these will I adduce a sufficiency to prove him a false noble and foul assassin. Yes!" added Sir William Douglas, now turning abruptly towards the bench of witnesses, and pointing with his long bony finger towards the shuddering Balveny,— "there is the vile accomplice of my kinsman's guilt!"

Magnus Balveny started to his feet, and seemed as if he were about to proclaim a denial of the accusation: but so terribly were the looks of the Knight of Liddesdale riveted upon him—so awful was the spectral appearance of that tall gaunt form, wrapped in the garments of the grave—that the wretched man gasped for utterance; the power of articulation failed him, and he sank back, pale, quivering, and overwhelmed, upon his seat.

The Earl of Douglas again made a fierce imperious gesture as if about to speak: but the Abbot of Melrose said, with all the dignity of his high spiritual and temporal offices of prelate and judge combined, "I command your silence, my lord! Let the accusation be first made: you shall then respond in your defence. 'Tis you yourself who have invoked the cognisance of this solemn tribunal: and to its authority shall you submit!"

"Who dares speak of submission to the Douglas?" thundered forth the voice of the Earl. "What, ho! my followers!—sit ye there like frightened children while your lord and master is thus being accused by a poor half-dead lunatic, and bearded by a proud priest?"

There was a movement amongst the Borderers at this speech: they however did little more than rise from their bench and place their hands upon their weapons. Sir Casimir D'Este, springing up, had already half drawn his own ponderous sword from its sheath; and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan was about to snatch a weapon from one of the retainers of the Earl of Caithness—but the aspect of incipient hostility quickly changed.

"Man of blood! silence, I command you!" cried the Abbot in a loud voice as he rose from his seat and thus addressed himself to the Earl of Douglas: then extending his crozier in the direction where the fierce Borderers sat, he said, "My sons, desecrate not the holy pile of Melrose with violence and strife! The pain and penalty of excommunication would attend upon ye if obedience were given to the mandate of your lawless lord! Ye have heard the thunders of heaven this night:—they are typical of the thunders which the Church would fulminate against ye from the high altar of Melrose!"

This speech, so solemn as well as commanding—so adjuring and impressive, produced all its most potent effects upon the Borderers. Their minds, already under the influence of superstitious awe from a variety of circumstances, succumbed in a moment to the mingled mandate, appeal, and threat conveyed by the words of a prelate whose character itself gave an additional power to his language. A solemn silence pervaded the hall—the Borderers had sunk down upon the bench from which they had half started—and their hands, drop-

ping from their sword-hilts, devoutly made the sign of the cross. Terrible was the scowl which passed over the countenance of the Earl of Douglas: he saw in a moment that he could not rely upon his followers to back him under existing circumstances in any deed of violence; and he dared not for the instant give vent to the fury of rage and disappointment which agitated like a pent-up volcano in his breast.

"Speak, Knight of Liddesdale," said the Lord Abbot of Melrose: "how support you the charges which you have brought against your kinsman?"

"Already have I proclaimed, my lord," responded Sir William Douglas, "that I have facts sufficient to substantiate the charge. For eighteen long years have I been a prisoner at the English Court. For the last few years my kinsman the Earl of Douglas has possessed himself of my estates in Liddesdale and Teviotdale, as well as my Castle of Hermitage. The pretext was specious by which he occupied my castle with his own retainers. It was to keep it in safety against my return, forsooth!" exclaimed the Knight with bitter irony. "But full well did I comprehend his motives!—full well did I penetrate his designs and his character! Let him deny that by means of agents he secretly intrigued at the English Court that my captivity might be perpetuated. Yes, my Lord Abbot! it is the truth which I am telling! Thus, on regaining my freedom, and on returning to Scotland, I went not straight to the portals of my ancestral castle. And why not? Because the instant that my feet should have passed the threshold of Hermitage, instead of being welcomed by my own leal and faithful vassals, I should have found myself in the midst of the creatures of my kinsman—such wretches as *this*, whom you may take as their type and specimen!"—and the Knight of Liddesdale again extended his long thin skinny finger towards the trembling, quailing Magnus Balveny.

There was a brief pause, during which the Earl of Douglas again made an impatient gesture as if he were about to speak: but the Abbot Benedictus checked him with a commanding look—and the fierce nobleman scowled with mingled hauteur and defiance.

"But this is not all!" resumed the Knight of Liddesdale. "Let my false kinsman deny if he dare that for the last six or seven years of my captivity he hath received the revenues of my estates. No! he cannot deny it! And therefore my sudden release from captivity and my return to my native soil indicated that the day of reckoning had come! But when was the Black Douglas ever known to disgorge the coin, which, no matter by what means, had found its way into his treasury? See then, my Lord Abbot, how inconvenient my presence in Scotland was to my kinsman—but on the other hand how convenient to him would be my death! Widower and childless as I am, my broad lands and my proud castle would become the heritage of the Earl of Douglas, and there would be no reckoning for the revenues which under the guise of friendly carefulness on my behalf he has duly gathered from my tenants and my vassals! And it was my death, Lord Abbot of Melrose, which that false Earl sought to compass!"

The Black Douglas gave vent to a scornful ejaculation—but he said not a word: and the Abbot made a sign for the Knight of Liddesdale to proceed.

"I am told," said the latter, "that Magnus Balveny was at the hostelry of the Unicorn last night. Doubtless the rumour had for some little time past reached my kinsman that my return to Scotland might be daily and hourly expected; and doubtless he calculated that if in a false confidence I went straight to the Hermitage I should fall into the lion's

den. But on the other hand he may have reflected that my suspicions might have been awakened—that I should avoid the snare—and that I should adopt a prudential course. Was not he on *his* side prepared? How happened it that at the very period when my return was anticipated he should be hunting in Ettrickdale and Liddesdale, afar from his own Castle of Tantallon in East Lothian? Was all this mere accident?—was it by accident likewise that he should have established his quarters at Closeburn Tower, which commands all the roads and pathways in these districts?—or again, was it by accident that his creature Magnus Balveny went to the Unicorn hostelry last evening? No!—in all these proceedings there were motives! I repaired not straight to Hermitage: it was my resolve to tarry a brief space at the hostelry, so as to communicate secretly with my faithful tenants and bondsmen, name a trysting-place, make the beacons blaze for a gathering, and at the head of my people march to the occupancy of my Castle of Hermitage. Such were my designs: but circumstances suddenly transpired to turn the course of events into another channel. I allude to my encounter and dispute with Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, followed by the challenge which he sent me and which in bounden duty I accepted. I went forth at an early hour this morning to meet my young opponent,—little dreaming that in the broad daylight the fiends of murder would cross my path. But it was so: for in the copse I was suddenly set upon by that false Earl and his treacherous creature Balveny! From a thicket they sprang upon me; not a moment had I to defend myself ere their weapons levelled me to the ground! And now, my Lord Abbot, my tale is told. I demand justice at your hands! I know that in your integrity you will pronounce it: but should you be powerless to enforce it, my appeal shall be made to the King and Parliament of Scotland!"

"Lord of Douglas," demanded the Abbot, "what have you to urge in your defence?"

"Did it please me," responded the Black Douglas, with mingled scorn and hauteur, "I might deny the competency of this tribunal—I might affirm that a belted Earl holds a loftier rank than a mitred Abbot, and that I can therefore be tried only by my peers. But of this quibble I will not avail myself—"

"And a quibble it would indeed be, my lord," interrupted Father Benedictus, with a noble and imposing dignity,—*"a quibble as futile as the tongue that might utter it would be false!"* For the mitred Abbots of Melrose rank with the proudest Earls of Scotland; and I, my lord, am in every sense your equal and your peer!"

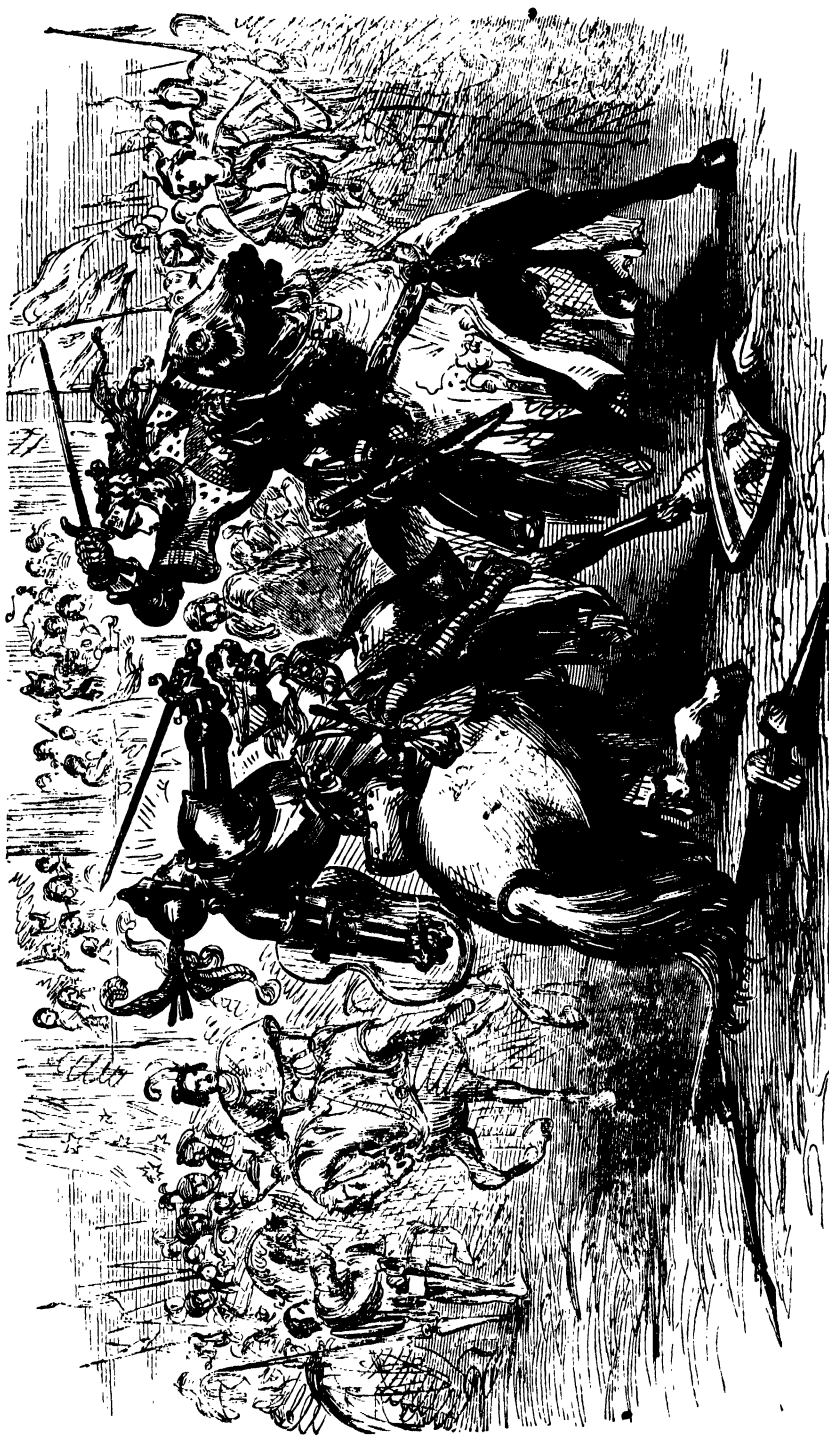
The Black Douglas knew that this was the fact, and did not therefore dare question it farther. For an instant he bit his lip with rage and chagrin; and he fiercely exclaimed, "It ill becomes the Douglas to imitate priests, schoolmen, or diplomatists in length of speech or subtlety of defence; but the tongue of a Douglas should be as trenchant as his sword; and therefore I say to the Knight of Liddesdale—In every syllable spoken against me thou hast lied!"

"False Earl and unnatural kinsman," exclaimed the old Knight, "I hurl back the lie in thy teeth!"

"By St. Bride, this defiance to the Douglas!" thundered forth the Black Earl, starting up from his seat and laying his hand upon his sword.

"Coward as well as traitor, plunderer, and assassin!" retorted the Knight of Liddesdale; "wouldst thou seek to provoke me to the combat, knowing as thou dost only too well, how the blood has already flowed in profusion from my veins?"

"Am I to understand," inquired the Lord Abbot, making a gesture for the Knight of Liddesdale to be



No. 5.—MARGARET.

silent,—“am I to understand, Earl of Douglas, that from this tribunal you appeal to the trial by arms and to the ordeal of battle?”

The Black Douglas drew himself up to his full height, and exclaimed in a loud sonorous voice, “I repel with indignation the charge that has been brought against me—I give my kinsman the lie—and I hurl defiance against every one who shall dare repeat the foul accusation that has been levelled at the Douglas!”

Thus speaking, the Earl drew off his gauntlet and dashed it with such violence upon the stone pavement that the steel glove raised a din which reverberated through the portals of the Chapter House into the adjacent cloisters.

Sir Casimir D’Este at once sprang up from his seat to rush forward and seize the gauntlet: but light as a fawn Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan bounded past the Teutonic warrior; and lifting up the steel glove, he exclaimed, “On behalf of the Knight of Liddesdale I accept the challenge which the false Earl of Douglas has thrown down!”

There was a murmur of applause throughout the spacious hall; and numerous eyes, beaming with admiration, were fixed upon the intrepid young knight. Nothing could exceed the Apollo-like beauty of his appearance at that moment. His countenance was animated with a chivalrous heroism—his lithe slender form was drawn up to its full height, his attitude displaying all the gracefulness of its symmetry, as with extended arm he held up the gauntlet which he had lifted from the floor.

“By St. Jude!” said Sir Casimir D’Este, thus speaking to the Earl of Caithness, “your lordship has reason to be proud of the youth whom from infancy you have reared! He forestalled me—or else had it pleased me well to do battle with the Black Douglas.”

“How say you, Knight of Liddesdale?” asked the Lord Abbot, who could scarcely restrain the emotions of mingled admiration and misgiving as he thus beheld his nephew standing forward to proclaim his readiness to meet the terrible Douglas in hostile encounter: “do you accept of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan as your champion?”

“Generous youth!” said the Knight of Liddesdale, seizing our hero’s hand and pressing it with the warmest enthusiasm, “how can I do otherwise than accept thy noble championship? Yes, my Lord Abbot, I accept him as my substitute, my vindicator, and avenger—for such will he indeed become if there be justice in heaven!”

The Black Douglas smiled with haughty scorn as he surveyed the stripling knight who had dared to lift his glove: but the attention of all present was now suddenly directed to another scene which occurred in the Chapter House.

“Inasmuch as my master,” exclaimed young Seton, “is to meet the arch-traitor in deadly fray, it is for me to chastise the accomplice and creature of the greater villain. Magnus Balveny, I dare thee also to the combat!”

“Insolent boy!” exclaimed Captain Balveny, measuring Seton with almost as haughtily scornful a regard as that which his master the Black Douglas had ere now bent upon Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan; “hold you your life so lightly—”

“Ah! does Magnus Balveny,” cried Seton, “need sterner provocation to raise his flagging mettle? Were not this a sacred place, I would bestow upon thee such a buffet as should make thy cheek tingle. But regard it as if the chastisement were inflicted!”

“Then have thine own way, wilful boy!” said Balveny; “and within the same hour that beholds

the defeat of thy presumptuous master, shall thine own life pay the penalty of this rashness!”

And now there was another incident which suddenly attracted all attention: for the Knight of Liddesdale, worn out by the excitement through which he had passed, sank down exhausted upon the pavement,—whence he was immediately lifted by Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and Father Cyrus. In a state of unconsciousness he was borne from the Chapter House to an apartment provided for his reception; and the Lord Abbot declared the present proceedings to be terminated, the Earl of Douglas having appealed to the law of arms as the means of vindicating his aspersed fame and honour.

CHAPTER X.

ROSLIN CASTLE.

THE reader will remember that the supposed corpse of the Knight of Liddesdale had been deposited in the dead-house of the Abbey. There the inensurable form was stripped of its garments and was enveloped in the grave-clothes. Father Cyrus entrusted the body to the keeping of Father Peter,—ordering him to remain alone in the dead-house and to allow none else to enter. The body was stretched upon a large wooden bench, with lighted tapers at head and foot; and throughout the day did Father Peter tarry by its side. The long hours passed—the evening came—and as Father Peter was kneeling to breathe a prayer for the welfare of the supposed dead one’s soul, it struck him that the body moved and that he heard a low faint sound like a moan. At first he was seized with a superstitious terror; but being naturally a strong-minded man, he soon regained his courage, and in a very few moments discovered that life was not extinct in the form that lay stretched before him. He quickly administered restoratives—for like most of the monks of that age, Father Peter had some knowledge of medicine; and when he found that the Knight of Liddesdale was regaining his consciousness, he hastened to fetch Father Cyrus. This holy priest at once hastened to the dead-house,—where, sure enough, he found Sir William Douglas sitting up on the bench, a ghastly spectral-like object, in his grave-clothes. When the old Knight was enabled to give utterance to a few intelligible words, he revealed the astounding secret that it was his own kinsman the Black Earl who had treacherously attempted his assassination. Father Cyrus bade Father Peter keep silence in respect to the whole extraordinary occurrences, until the will and pleasure of the Lord Abbot should have been ascertained; and then, as we have seen, the good monk sped to the Abbot’s private apartment, where he burst in somewhat unceremoniously upon the interview that was taking place between the reverend prelate and his warrior brother. We need not say how astonished were the Abbot and Sir Casimir on receiving the intelligence that the Knight of Liddesdale still lived—how shocked they were at the iniquitous conduct of the Earl of Douglas—or how delighted they felt that circumstances should have so transpired as to render the innocence of their beloved youthful nephew manifest beyond even the slightest lingering taint of suspicion. The mind of the Abbot was quickly made up in respect to the course which should now be pursued. He foresaw that the Earl of Douglas and his vile creature Balveny would deny the crime, and that as the Knight of Liddesdale’s character was now thought lightly of in Scotland, his unsupported testimony would scarcely obtain general belief. He

therefore resolved to prepare a scene the dramatic effect of which he hoped would take the Earl of Douglas and Magnus Balveny so completely by surprise, and produce such a startling impression, that they might confess their iniquity. Hence the strict secrecy which was maintained in reference to the resuscitation of the Knight of Liddesdale; and hence the suddenness of his appearance, enveloped in the grave-clothes, before the assemblage in the Chapter House. The reader may now likewise understand how it was that the Lord Abbot decided upon holding the trial that very night; and if the intelligence of the supposed dead man's resuscitation were kept back from the knowledge of even the youthful prisoner himself, it was that he might enter the tribunal with the air of one who felt himself accused of a fearful crime, instead of presenting himself with a look of joy and triumph which would have perhaps excited suspicion, or at all events to a certain degree marred the solemn effect intended to be produced.

Who can describe the delight of Margaret Fitz-Allan and the Lady Albertina Roslin when young Seton suddenly rushed into their presence and announced the complete vindication of Sir Fleming from the foul charge which had been brought against him? But when the entire proceedings had terminated, Margaret was dismayed and Albertina was stricken with grief and consternation, on learning that the object of their interest had accepted the challenge of the Black Douglas. For the Earl was as formidable and as famed in battle as his kinsman the stout Knight of Liddesdale himself; and the two ladies trembled at the idea that the comparatively inexperienced stripling should have to encounter the stalwart practised warrior. Margaret's natural strength of mind however soon came to her assistance; and even Albertina was somewhat consoled, when the Abbot of Melrose, on paying his respects to the ladies in the morning after the trial, solemnly remarked "that the youthful David, when inspired and sustained by heaven, slew the mighty Goliath, champion of the Philistines."

The Earl of Caithness and his party, with Sir Casimir D'Este, now took leave of the Abbot and the monks of Melrose, to set off for Roslin Castle. It had been already arranged that the trial by battle should take place in the immediate neighbourhood of Roslin, on the third day thence, so that the Earl of Caithness might have leisure to have the lists duly prepared, and to make whatever other arrangements were required for the solemn ordeal. The Teutonic Knight, in consequence of recent occurrences, postponed his visit to Edinburgh, and agreed to become the Earl's guest at Roslin Castle, in order that he might be present at the contest. The Abbot of Melrose gratified without revealing his feelings as the kinsman of Fleming and Margaret Fitz-Allan, by presenting them both with several valuable gifts, on the plea that he admired the youth for his chivalrous conduct, and that he sympathised with his sister for all the anxiety she had sustained and was even still sustaining on her brother's account. We should observe that the Earl of Douglas and his party had quitted Melrose for Cloverburn Tower, immediately after the trial, in the middle of the night,—the Earl having pledged himself and passed his word for Magnus Balveny that they would both appear in the lists near Roslin Castle on the appointed day. As for the Knight of Liddesdale, he remained in a very precarious state, but under the kind ministering care of the holy fathers of the Abbey.

The distance between Melrose and Roslin Castle being only about twenty miles, was accomplished in a few hours; and early in the afternoon the Earl of

Caithness once more set foot within the halls of his ancestors, after an absence of seven years. A faithful steward had directed the Earl's affairs during that interval: no confiscation of the estates had taken place; and the vast domain was as flourishing as when its noble owner was compelled to flee from it. A princely establishment had the Earl of Caithness, following the example of his forefathers, been accustomed to keep up; and by his special command was it maintained during his absence. Messengers had been despatched to Roslin to announce the hour of his return; and a joyous welcome did the nobleman and his friends experience. The great banner floated over the proud towers of Roslin: the feudal vassals, having assembled, equipped as if for warlike service, formed a guard of honour: their wives and families, all bedecked with their holiday apparel, were congregated to express their joy and to welcome the wanderers home. A bevy of beautiful maidens selected for the purpose, presented bouquets of flowers to the Earl of Caithness, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, Sir Casimir D'Este, the Lady Albertina, and Margaret; and with flowers likewise was the pathway strewn through the glen leading to the Castle. The numerous members of that establishment—with Hieburn, the faithful steward, at their head—came forth to greet their lord and his companions; and the very welkin rang with enthusiastic shouts as well as with the thrilling sounds of music and the shrill screaming of the bagpipes.

Roslin Castle is now, like the once glorious Melrose, but a mere ruin: we shall briefly describe it as it appeared at the time whereof we are writing. From the midst of a deep glen rose up a mass of lofty detached rocks, on the summit of which the palatial fortalice stood. Overlooking the river North Esk, which rolled its rapid foaming course round two sides of the base of the hill, the Castle commanded a view unequalled for the mingled grandeur, sublimity, and picturesque beauty of the scenery. On the two sides which precipitously overhung the river Esk, the fortalice was naturally impregnable; while on the other sides the deep glen constituted a vast dry moat crossed by a narrow stone bridge,—the sole entrance into the Castle consisting of a huge arching gateway, protected by a drawbridge and portcullis. The summit of the rock was enclosed by irregular lines of strong stone ramparts: but so spacious was this enclosure that not merely did it contain the immense Castle with all its numerous outhouses, but likewise gardens, pleasure-grounds, and orchards. The glen was clothed in the depths of its hollow as well as on its sides, with a thick wood; and masses of the richest foliage covered with their verdant garments the precipices overlooking the Esk as well as the numerous towering heights which existed in the neighbourhood, and which being inaccessible to the foot of man, served as natural outworks or barriers against the approach of an enemy. The Castle itself consisted of a variety of irregular buildings, looking as if they had been thrown as it were at different times together, but still having a uniformity of appearance in consequence of the prevailing Gothic style of the architecture. The entrance-gate was halfway up the acclivity from the glen; and when once the huge portals were passed, a gradually ascending road, cut out of the rock, led up into the principal court-yard, where the mighty Donjon in its massive and gloomy isolation towered high above all the surrounding structures.

That court-yard being reached, the Castle had the appearance of a little town divided into irregular streets, the main building containing spacious suites of apartments furnished in the handsomest style which could possibly characterize the age whereof

we are writing. At least two hundred retainers of the Earl of Caithness dwelt within those walls, forming the domestic establishment, and totally distinct from the occasional garrison of feudal warriors, who indeed were only summoned thither in times and cases of need. The steward, pipers, cup-bearers, butlers, carvers, and henchmen, were all richly dressed and wore chains of gold. The female dependants attached to the service of the Lady Albertina and of Margaret, were a dozen in number (though only four had accompanied them to France); and they belonged to the most respectable families amongst the tenantry of the Earl's domain. There were numerous pages, lacqueys, torch-bearers, groomsmen, stable men, and gardeners. For his own personal service the Earl ordinarily had ten valets or pages of the bed-chamber, likewise belonging to a respectable grade of life. The kitchen-offices swarmed with menials belonging to that department: the cellar, the dairy, the pantry, and the store-rooms likewise had their special officials. In short it was a splendid establishment of which we are speaking, and one which could only be maintained by a nobleman of immense wealth.

But to continue our narrative. Once again was the Earl of Caithness in the halls of his ancestors: again too was Fleming Fitz-Allan in his own suite of apartments: again were the Lady Albertina and Margaret in their respective "bowers," as the ladies' boudoirs in those times were designated. Sir Casimir D'Este was escorted by the Earl himself to the apartments that were used only for the most honoured guests; and in addition to his own squire, Jassent, the Knight had four pages appointed to attend upon him.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the party thus reached Roslin Castle, amidst the welcomings and rejoicings which we have only briefly glanced at, but which were of the most enthusiastic description. These were to be followed by great festivities: for Hepburn, knowing his lord's will in such matters, had made ample preparations. The day being remarkably fine after the storm of the preceding night, numerous tables had been arranged in the orchard for the accommodation of the tenantry; while the banqueting-hall had been fitted in a worthy manner for the joyous occasion. In their respective apartments the principal personages made suitable changes in their apparel; and we should observe that the Teutonic Knight's mail-trunks had been brought from Melrose to Roslin. Presently those personages to whom we have alluded, were assembled in what may be termed the state drawing-room—a spacious and sumptuously furnished apartment. The Earl of Caithness was now apparelled with a richness becoming his rank and wealth; and in every sense he looked the great Scottish noble of the feudal age,—dignified as a peer, affable as a host, cordial as a friend, and gracious as a master. Sir Casimir D'Este was attired with what may be termed an elegant simplicity: but a gem of incalculable worth flashed in the ring which he wore upon his finger; and around his neck was suspended the massive gold chain, with the elaborately-worked cross symbolic of the chivalrous Order to which he belonged. Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan was handsomely apparelled; and the joyousness of his manner, natural and gushing with youthful enthusiasm, proved with what courageous hopefulness he looked forward to the issue of the combat that in three days was to take place. The Lady Albertina wore a light dress, which set off her delicate beauty to the utmost advantage; while the more stately Margaret appeared in a robe of dark velvet, which imparted an

air of almost queenly grandeur to her fine countenance and handsome person.

Scarcely were these personages assembled in the drawing-room, when a cavalcade of some twenty horsemen was seen to enter the court-yard from up the winding ascent of pathway; and at the head rode a tall, handsome, dark-haired young man, whose age might be about five-and-twenty. This was Roland Mountjoy, now Earl of Bassentyne—one of the wealthiest peers of Scotland, and who maintained at his own neighbouring castle a state as sumptuous as that which we have been describing in respect to Roslin. He was elegantly dressed; and his followers were apparelled with a suitable richness.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness, hastening to one of the windows which looked upon the court-yard; "here is Roland come to welcome us—and in full time to join us at the banqueting-table! Seven years have elapsed since last I saw him; and the elegant youth of the other day has grown into the fine young man. He may rest assured that his greeting here shall be a cordial one!"

Margaret had as yet said nothing to her brother in reference to the design of the Earl of Caithness to bestow the hand of Albertina upon Lord Bassentyne; she was naturally unwilling to excite in his mind a cause of vexation and annoyance, standing as he was upon the threshold of a conflict for which he would require all his energies alike mental and physical. She had implored Albertina to exercise a complete command over her own feelings, and not betray to Fleming that her bosom experienced any secret source of affliction. She felt assured that from motives of becoming delicacy the Earl of Caithness would for the present abstain from any pointed allusion to the intended nuptials—because it was to be supposed that he would afford his daughter and the young Lord Bassentyne an interval of leisure to become better acquainted with each other (for their former acquaintance was that of a mere boy and girl) ere he threw out a single syllable in respect to the wedding ceremony. Besides, as a combat was to take place the result of which might possibly remove for ever a member of the circle and plunge the house into mourning, Margaret knew that this reason alone would prevent the Earl of Caithness from dropping so much as a hint relative to the gay circumstances of a bridal. Thus, all things considered, she felt confident that the Earl's matrimonial design in respect to his daughter might be concealed, at least for the present, from Fleming. Should he survive the approaching combat it would be time enough to whisper the circumstance in his ear—and time enough for Margaret likewise to reflect how the Earl's project might be frustrated and the cause of the lovers succoured.

The Teutonic Knight was likewise thinking at the same moment of Fleming's love for Albertina; and as he furtively contemplated his nephew's countenance, as the young Earl of Bassentyne's name was mentioned, he saw that it underwent no change; and he therefore felt convinced that Fleming was as yet ignorant of Lord Caithness's matrimonial projects. For the same reasons which had occurred to Margaret, Sir Casimir not only thought that it would be better to leave the youth still in ignorance upon the point, but that this might very well be done under existing circumstances.

Seven years had elapsed since the young Earl of Bassentyne last saw Albertina and Margaret. Albertina was then a sweet pretty child of ten years old—Margaret was a handsome and already well-grown girl of eleven. Now, as Roland entered the apartment, he beheld at a glance the exquisitely lovely but bashful and retiring young lady of seven-

teen—and at another glance the superb handsome young woman of eighteen. His looks for a moment expressed a feeling of interest on beholding Albertina: but they lingered with admiration on the countenance and the noble form of Margaret. High-minded, generous-hearted, frank in his manners, and cordial in his disposition, the young Earl or Bassentyne warmly welcomed the exiles back to their native land: it was even with a species of fraternal enthusiasm that he encountered Fleming who was often the playmate of his former years; and he seemed proud to make the acquaintance of Sir Casimir D'Este, not only as a member of the noblest order of European chivalry, but likewise as a warrior of whose extraordinary prowess with the Borderers at the Unicorn Inn he had already heard full details.

We pass over the festivities which now ensued; and we may also observe that during the next two days nothing of any consequence transpired. Roland paid his attentions alike to Albertina and Margaret with the courtesy of a gentleman and the affability of a guest: but these attentions were in no way marked with any preference;—and thus Fleming Fitz-Allan continued utterly unsuspecting of the design harboured by the Earl of Caithness in respect to his daughter.

The day fixed for the combat dawned; and from the earliest hour crowds from all the adjacent parts of the country came pouring in to the spot where the lists were laid out. This was upon the large plain which lay beyond the glen,—numerous carpenters having been kept at work to construct the barriers forming the enclosure, and the amphitheatrical ranges of seats for the accommodation of the most distinguished spectators. Noblemen, knights, and wealthy gentlemen from all parts arrived to witness this passage-of-arms, the report of which had already been bruited far and near. The Earl of Douglas and a party of his retainers had arrived on the previous day at a house in the immediate neighbourhood, in order that a short mile's ride might on the memorable morning take him to the scene in which he was to figure as the principal.

By half-past eight o'clock in the morning the lists were almost completely surrounded by the crowds that had flocked from all parts. A little before nine the Black Douglas, sheathed in complete armour, attended by Magnus Balveny and two squires, and followed by a dozen Borderers, was seen riding slowly towards the large tent placed for his accommodation at one extremity of the lists. The Earl was mounted upon a strong grey horse richly caparisoned and covered with armour from head to tail. As there were many of the retainers, vassals, and bondsmen of the Douglas amongst the crowd, a tolerably loud cheer greeted his presence; and it was sustained until alighting from his steed he entered the tent provided for him.

But far louder and far more genuine in its enthusiasm was the cheer which greeted Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, as the youth made his appearance, accompanied by Seton, and attended by two squires, one carrying his shield and the other his spear. Fleming was mounted on a handsome black charger also richly caparisoned. His bright steel casque was surmounted with crimson plumes: his armour, partially of plated steel and partially of exquisitely manufactured chain-mail, set off the graceful symmetry of his shape. His vizor was raised: his countenance beamed with a noble heroism; and he bowed gracefully in acknowledgment of the enthusiastic plaudits with which he was received. Indeed, those plaudits were prolonged after he had entered the tent prepared for his reception.

Sir Casimir D'Este, followed by Jassent and four pages, rode into the midst of the lists to fulfil the part of umpire and marshal of the field—an office which he had accepted with the full concurrence of the Earl Douglas. He also was clad in complete armour; and his presence elicited a loud cheer as a tribute of the prowess he had displayed at the Unicorn Tavern. And now the raised seats speedily began to receive their occupants,—handsomely dressed nobles and knights and beautifully apparelled ladies. Last of all appeared the Earls of Caithness and Bassentyne, with the Lady Albertina Roslin and Margaret Fitz-Allan. Loud and prolonged cheers greeted them as they ascended into what might be termed the grand stand, and took their seats beneath a velvet canopy richly fringed with gold.

On a sign being given by Sir Casimir D'Este, the trumpets proclaimed the signal for the combatants to issue forth. In a few moments the Earl of Douglas, with his two squires, appeared in front of his tent; while at the other extremity of the lists Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, similarly attended, came from his own tent. Then forth from the first-mentioned tent proceeded Magnus Balveny, attended by a single Borderer, both being on foot; while on the other side the brave young Seton, followed by a stripling page, issued forth from Sir Fleming's tent.

The trumpets again sounded, as a signal that Sir Casimir D'Este, Marshal of the Lists, was about to make the usual proclamation,—when a numerous cavalcade of splendidly apparelled horsemen was seen galloping across the plain towards the lists; and now the universal cry arose—"The King! the King!"

✦

CHAPTER XI.

THE KING.

KING DAVID II of Scotland was, at the date of which we are writing, in his fortieth year. He was tall, well-formed, and of noble appearance. Strongly built, but without the slightest inclination to corpulency, his well-knit frame was a model of mature manly symmetry,—while it had that elasticity which fitted it either for the courtly ceremonies of palatial saloons or for the martial exercises which the monarch loved and in which he excelled. His hair was of a dark brown—his eyes were blue and exceedingly expressive: he had a high forehead and a fine Grecian profile. His character has already been accurately though succinctly described in the statements made by the Earl of Caithness to Sir Casimir D'Este when they were fellow-passengers on board the Dutch ship. Indeed, the Scottish monarch, though possessing the qualities of a warrior and the polished manners which fitted him to shine as the leading star in the Court galaxy, had many vices and failings, amongst which a profligate extravagance, an intense selfishness, and an addiction to voluptuous pleasures were the principal. Because he inherited the name and the crown of the great Bruce, he fancied that Scotland owed him as immense a debt of gratitude as that which it had acknowledged to his illustrious father; and he therefore thought that whatsoever taxes were levied to raise funds for the maintenance of his expenditure, ought to be paid without the slightest grumbling. The eleven years' imprisonment which he had endured in England as the result of his own headstrong rashness in hazarding the battle of Nevill's Cross, he was wont to regard as an immense sacrifice personally made and a veritable martyrdom ex-

perienched on behalf of the Scottish people; and therefore he considered that on his restoration to the throne he was justified in leading a life of pleasure and indulgence at the expense of his subjects.

The great nobles, wearied of a warfare which had devastated their estates and impoverished their revenues, were inclined to humour the King so long as he showed an inclination for peace; for they feared lest if they manifested discontent, he would seek to create a diversion of the public feeling by having recourse to fresh hostilities and hazarding another catastrophe like that of Nevill's Cross. So long, therefore, as the powerful feudal barons submitted to his pecuniary exactions and displayed no very virulent opposition to the King in the parliament, he practised the negative virtue of forbearance from tyranny, and thus considered himself entitled to the character of a merciful monarch. Yet in his heart he was vindictive, and even cherished rancour against those who gave him offence. He clung with tenacity to the *prestige* of his illustrious father's name; and for this reason he was inexorable in the maintenance of all the laws which had been made or the decrees which had been promulgated during the time of Robert Bruce. Amongst his courtiers and friends he was what in the present day would be termed a boon companion; and through ostentation, whim, or caprice, he lavished honours, pensions, and titles upon those who pleased him or who rendered him a service; so that the interested persons who benefited thereby loudly proclaimed his generosity, and superficial observers were led to believe that he was really generous. His conversation was gay and sprightly; he was an adept in paying happy and well-turned compliments to the fair sex; he excelled in the dance as well as in the tournament; he had a taste for music, and was exceedingly skilful in all gymnastic exercises, in which he frequently condescended to indulge on public occasions; so that altogether with certain sections of society he was by no means unpopular. He was a widower, his wife Joanna having died a couple of years previous to the date of our narrative's commencement. Being in the prime of life and fond of the sex, it was no wonder if the rumour had been whispered that his Majesty would most probably marry again if his tastes should happen to settle upon any lady possessing the qualifications sufficient to enmesh him with the silken chains of love.

When the cry arose of "The King! the King!" Sir Casimir D'Este suspended the proclamation of the usual formulas which in his capacity of Marshal of the Lists he was about to make; and thus the proceedings were stayed that the royal presence might be awaited. The monarch's cavalcade advanced at a rapid pace—the outskirts of the crowd were soon reached—and a way was at once opened in the midst of the assemblage to allow the royal party to proceed towards the principal stand. The cheering was moderately loud and continuous, but by no means enthusiastic nor even general:—it might be compared to that which had greeted the appearance of the Earl of Douglas, but it lacked the fervour which had been displayed towards Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, Sir Casimir D'Este, or the Earl of Caithness. Nevertheless the King seemed well pleased with his reception, or at least affected to appear so: he raised his plumed cap and bowed with an air in which the patronising dignity of the self-sufficient monarch was mingled with that courtly grace which so eminently distinguished him. He was dressed with exceeding richness; and all his followers—about thirty in number, amongst whom were several personages bearing the proudest Scottish titles, such as Mar, Lennox, Argyle, Athol, and

Buccleugh—were appalled in a style of corresponding sumptuousness.

The Earl of Caithness, accompanied by the Earl of Bassentyne and several other distinguished noblemen, had hastened to descend from the principal stand the instant the approach of the King was announced: and as he rode up to the spot they made obeisance in the usual manner. In the meanwhile the champions were stationary at their posts,—Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, on his black steed, at the extremity of the lists nearest to the grand stand—the Earl of Douglas, on his grey charger, at the other end of the enclosure. Near what might be termed one side of the lists—the palisade being erected in an oval form—young Seton and Magnus Balveny, who were to fight on foot, had halted in front of each other, with an interval of about twenty paces between. Sir Casimir D'Este sat motionless on his steed, awaiting the signification of the royal pleasure in reference to the proceedings.

We must remind the reader that eighteen years had elapsed since the Earl of Caithness last saw the Scottish King, which was at the battle of Nevill's Cross, where the Earl had distinguished himself, and where he was fortunate enough to avoid being taken prisoner. The then stripling monarch had grown to be a man in the prime of life: the nobleman was now a personage of mature years. For a few moments they looked at each other as if the changes which they thus respectively beheld irresistibly forced upon their minds the effects of the lapse of time; and that temporary silence was broken by the King, who extending his hand, exclaimed in the blandest tones which he could adopt, "My Lord of Caithness, I greet you on your return to Scotland—and may I hope that no untoward circumstance will again alienate you from our territory."

The Earl, as in duty bound, kissed the hand which was thus proffered to him; and the King hastened to add, "Not a syllable upon the past! let it all be forgotten!"—for whenever it suited the purpose of David to forgive any one who had happened to offend him, it was his policy to adopt the most friendly demeanour in order to secure the pardoned personage amongst the number of his supporters.

David now flung a hasty glance over the lists: thence his looks were immediately turned up towards the fair occupants of the tiers of the grand stand; and as all the ladies had risen from their seats in token of respect for the presence of Majesty, he again doffed his plumed cap, this time bowing with all the courtly ease and grace which he was in the habit of adopting towards the higher grades of the fair sex.

"Would your Majesty deign to occupy a seat in the amphitheatre?" inquired the Earl of Caithness; "or if my liege's royal pleasure were otherwise signified —"

"Most ungracious and unknighly were it, as well as demonstrative of execrable taste on my part," interrupted David, with another glance towards the ladies, "were I to hesitate a moment in accepting your lordship's courtesy."

Thus speaking, the King lightly descended from his saddle—tossed the reins to a page who was in readiness to receive them—and ascended into the stand, followed by the Earl of Caithness and the other nobles who had descended to greet him. He passed into the front tier, and quickly found himself in the presence of the Lady Albertina and Margaret Fitz-Allan. He bent a glance expressive of pleasure and interest upon Albertina, whose delicate yet exquisite style of loveliness had thus impressed him: but it was a look of surprise and fervid admiration which the monarch turned upon the superb beauty of Margaret. The Earl of Caithness hastened to

perform the ceremony of introductions,—thus presenting in the first place his daughter the Lady Albertina, and in the second place Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan: for the term "Mistress" was in that age used alike in reference to spinsters and to married women amongst those grades which were not entitled to the prefix of "Lady." In introducing Margaret, the Earl of Caithness briefly described her as the daughter of a dear deceased friend who had been reared with his own daughter as her companion.

Having spoken some courtly words to the two young ladies, the King took a seat between them, and with a graceful gesture indicated permission for all the rest to be seated. He then said, addressing the Earl of Caithness, "The sad tidings of all that has lately taken place at Melrose, and of this pending combat, reached our ears in Edinburgh; and our curiosity has thus led us to be present at so remarkable a passage of arms. Yonder we recognise our faithful Earl of Douglas; and this well-looking stripling"—now motioning towards Fitz-Allan—"we take to be his antagonist? But yonder stalwart knight, who, with his attendant pages, seems to hold authority over the lists—"

"That, sire," responded the Earl of Caithness, "is the valorous Sir Casimir D'Este, member of the high and noble Teutonic Order."

"By my troth!" exclaimed the King, "it is a good sight to behold a warrior of his prowess—unless indeed the rumour which reached me be exaggerated, and that instead of dealing with some dozen of the Borderers at the tavern—"

"The feat was veritably performed, sire—and I see that the tale has been truthfully reported to your Grace," answered the Earl of Caithness: for we should inform our readers that in the times of which we are writing, and even down to a much later period, the titles of Majesty, Grace, and Highness, were indiscriminately addressed to crowned monarchs.

David was making some further comment upon the recent proceedings which had led to the present encounter of hostile opponents—and he was just on the point of desiring that the ceremonies which his arrival had temporarily interrupted, might be continued—when a fresh incident occurred to delay them. This was the appearance at a little distance of a species of vehicle or small covered wain, drawn by two horses, and which was advancing slowly, as may be supposed when we add that in addition to the driver, an elderly priest was walking by the side. As this equipage reached the outskirts of the crowd, it was quickly ascertained for what purpose it served; and the report was brought to the Earl of Caithness, who quickly communicated it to the King. The covered cart was indeed nothing else but a litter upon wheels, bearing the form of the Knight of Liddesdale, who, though in a dying state, was anxious to be a witness of the combat. The remonstrances of the worthy monks of Melrose having proved unavailing, arrangements had been made to transport the wounded old Knight in the most convenient manner to the scene of the conflict; and the monk who walked by the side of the equipage was Father Cyrus.

An immense sensation prevailed amongst the multitude when the rumour of the Knight of Liddesdale's presence was rapidly circulated. The reasons have already been stated for which the veteran's character had fallen into disrepute amongst the Scottish people: but now, with characteristic generosity, the masses who were there assembled, chose to put aside whatsoever motives of political prejudice they might have entertained towards the Knight of Liddesdale:—they only

thought of him as a man who had been most foully dealt with by some assassin hand. Thus, as the equipage passed amidst the crowd, expressions of deep sympathy fell from many a lip; and there were not wanting voices to proclaim the hope that Sir William Douglas would, through the medium of his youthful champion Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, be avenged upon his kinsman the Earl.

But amidst all the sympathy which was shown towards the Knight of Liddesdale, there was a certain sentiment of curiosity to mark how the King might act. For the old Knight had been David's intermediary and creature in negotiating with Edward III of England certain arrangements most dishonouring to Scotland, and which the Scottish Parliament had accordingly rejected with scorn. How, then, would the Knight of Liddesdale now be treated by the King, who had repudiated him as an agent and had disavowed him altogether when he found that the Parliament was determined to display such a spirit in the matter?

David, like all selfish persons, possessed no small amount of astuteness and craftiness; and he at once perceived that he had a somewhat difficult part to play. He knew the hasty, haughty, impetuous temper of Sir William Douglas: he fancied that this temper on his part might be still further embittered by mental and physical sufferings—and he foresaw that nothing was more probable than that the old Knight would tax him with ingratitude or reproach him with political perfidy in the presence of the entire assemblage. The King therefore, after a few moments' reflection, suddenly made up his mind how to act; and glancing around upon the nobles who were nearest to him, he said, "Although, my lords, I had much cause for anger against the Knight of Liddesdale, inasmuch that he exceeded the license accorded unto him in his intercourse on my behalf with Edward of England,—yet is his present condition such as to disarm all resentment and inspire sympathy in its place. He fought and bled by my side on the day from which dated all the sacrifices I have made on behalf of my beloved Scotland; and therefore will I now treat him as a grateful Prince should treat a veteran warrior who in most things was faithful, though in a few things he erred!"

Having thus spoken, and making a sign for the Earl of Caithness and his friends to remain where they were, King David descended from the stand and approached the litter, which by this time had advanced nearly to the front of that amphitheatrical pavilion. Father Cyrus, at once recognising his Majesty, pronounced the usual benediction; and the King said, "Lift the covering, holy friar, that I may grasp the hand of my veteran servitor, the stout Knight of Liddesdale!"

The curtain forming the side of the covering of the litter, was at once raised; and Sir William Douglas was discovered lying in the couch which had been conveniently arranged for his accommodation. His face was ghastly pale, and the impress of death was already upon his features.

"My gallant friend," said the King, now speaking in a very low voice, which vibrated tremulously, either with an affected emotion, or else perhaps with some genuine concern on the dying warrior's behalf,—"it pains me infinitely to behold you in this plight!"

"If your Majesty have really any regard for one who has ever served you faithfully, and who in his latter days considered your Grace's mandates and wishes in preference to his own fair fame and honour," said the Knight of Liddesdale, speaking feebly and with painful efforts, "your Highness will grant me the boon which I am about to crave."

Although there was a certain degree of humility in the phrasing of this speech, yet there was an unmistakable significance in the Knight's looks, which King David could not fail to understand. It was as much as to imply that if the monarch refused the boon about to be demanded, the Knight would make certain revelations in respect to his recent negotiations with King Edward, which would expose all the duplicity and double-dealing of the Scottish Sovereign to the world. David did not however choose to show either by word or look that he felt that he was thus being menaced or coerced; but with an air of the most friendly sympathy, he said, "Speak, my faithful servant! How is it possible that in existing circumstances your King can refuse you aught which in honour he may grant?"

"'Tis well, sire!" responded Sir William Douglas; and the gratitude of a dying man is now sincerely given unto your Highness. Holy father"—thus addressing himself to the monk of Melrose—"take forth your tablets, and in clerical style record the boon I am about to ask, together with the solemn affirmative assurance which his gracious Majesty will presently give."

Father Cyrus did as he was requested; and the Knight of Liddesdale proceeded in the following manner:—

"Inasmuch as I, a dying man, have no heir of my own body to inherit my estates—and inasmuch as by the laws of feudal heritage they would at my demise pass into the possession of my kinsman the Earl of Douglas,—but whereas I have suffered and sustained the foulest wrong at the hands of this kinsman of mine,—I demand that the King in the exercise of his prerogative shall ordain that my estates be otherwise inherited, according to the will and testament I am about to make. Have you written this, holy father?"

"I have, my son," responded the monk of Melrose.

"These, then, are my last desires and wishes," proceeded the veteran warrior. "Whatever be the result of the combat about to ensue, the Earl of Douglas is to be excluded from all right and title of heritage in respect to my estates in Liddesdale and Teviotdale and my Castle of Hermitage. Furthermore, should the gallant young Knight, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, survive the pending combat, it is my desire to bequeath unto him, as a token of admiration and gratitude for his noble conduct, my said estates in Liddesdale and Teviotdale and my Castle of Hermitage. Is this duly written, holy father?"

"It is, my son," responded the monk. "Have you aught more to record?"

"Yes—a few last words," said the old Knight; "for it is needful that I should make still further provision touching and concerning the bequeathment of my domains,—having in view the possibility (though heaven forefend it!) that the chivalrous youth may perish in the battle which he is about to dare as my champion! Therefore, should such a deplorable catastrophe ensue, it is my will and desire that my estates in Liddesdale and Teviotdale and my Castle of Hermitage shall devolve upon the gallant youth's sister, Margaret Fitz-Allan; so that she may be thereby assured of the gratitude which I, William Douglas, bore towards her gallant brother, and that she may be in some sense comforted for his loss, should it please heaven this day that the champion of truth and justice succumb and perish in the conflict. Is all this written, holy father?"

"It is written, my son," rejoined the reverend monk, "precisely as the speech itself has flowed from your lips."

"Gracious monarch," said the Knight of Liddesdale, "the moment is now come for you to fulfil

your royal pledge that my boon shall be granted. Without your Grace's assent these bequeathments of my domain cannot take place; but your royal autograph will in a moment legalize them."

King David, though maintaining a serene expression of countenance, was inwardly much troubled and perplexed as the Knight of Liddesdale went on dictating his testamentary wishes and instructions. The King would rather have made enemies of any dozen Scottish peers than take a step which could not fail to render the formidable Earl of Douglas his irreconcilable foe. It was true that the Earl might possibly succumb in the approaching combat—in which case the Knight of Liddesdale's testamentary instructions could be easily and readily carried out. But on the other hand the Earl of Douglas might come off victorious,—a result which the King deemed to be far the more probable, considering his hitherto unconquered prowess as a warrior, and considering likewise the inexperience of the stripling Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan. In this case the Earl of Douglas would be held by the law of battle to have absolved himself of the charge of assassination brought against him; and his ire would be terrible on finding that the King had prejudged him, so to speak, as a guilty person, by assenting to his utter exclusion from the heritage of his dying kinsman's estates. This was the difficulty which the King rapidly and painfully envisaged: but on the other hand there was the solemn pledge he had given to grant the Knight of Liddesdale's boon—and what to David himself was even still more important, there was likewise the necessity of placing a seal upon the old Knight's lips in respect to all the secret negotiations at the Court of the King of England. True, however, to his usual policy of selfishness and astuteness, not unblended with rashness, the King made up his mind to avoid the present and immediate evil, and leave the prospective one either to the current of chances or for future consideration. He therefore, with every outward show of the most friendly readiness, affixed his signature to the words which Father Cyrus had written down in his tablets.

"And now," said the Knight of Liddesdale, "let these tablets, holy father, be forthwith consigned to the keeping of the Earl of Caithness, who is an upright and honourable nobleman, and in whom I have the fullest faith."

The King for an instant bit his lip and the colour flushed his countenance, as the Knight of Liddesdale thus seemed to imply a certain suspicion of the royal integrity by establishing a guarantee for the carrying-out of his instructions; but it did not suit the monarch's purpose to give expression to his transient anger. A solemn silence had prevailed around the litter while the preceding scene took place; and those who were nearest, not only on the part of the crowd but likewise in the front seats of the great pavilion, overheard what passed. Margaret Fitz-Allan revealed not by her countenance whatsoever feelings she might in reality have experienced on learning the generous design of the perishing Knight of Liddesdale to enrich either her brother or herself as the case might be; Albertina watched her with anxiety depicted upon her features; while the Earl of Caithness for a moment had a troubled look—but he quickly composed his countenance. There was something passing in the minds of those three individuals which was unsuspected by the friends who were about them, and which we shall not here pause to explain. Father Cyrus proceeded to consign the tablets into the keeping of the Earl of Caithness, who received them in silence, but with a low bow in homage to the autograph of Majesty.



"Now, sire," said the Knight of Liddesdale, "I shall die contented—and I pray heaven to sustain me yet for a brief space, until I behold the issue of the combat which naught need now delay!"

The King grasped the hand of the dying Knight; and once more ascending to his seat between the Lady Albertina Roslin and Margaret Fitz-Allan, he waved his hand as a signal to Sir Casimir D'Este to perform his duty as Marshal of the Lists.

Before concluding this chapter, we should observe that those within the lists remained completely ignorant of what was passing in front of the great stand; and though the lips of those who were nearest, whispered the circumstances, which were speedily rumoured throughout the assemblage of spectators, the report was not borne to the ears of the champions nor of any one within the vast enclosure.

CHAPTER XII

THE COMBAT.

THE trumpets again sounded the signal for silence, while the Marshal of the Lists made the usual proclamation. Raising his powerful voice so that its sonorous tones were everywhere audible, Sir Casimir D'Este spoke to the following effect:—

"There stands the noble and mighty lord the Earl of Douglas, prepared to defend himself by the ordeal of battle against certain grave charges which have been proclaimed to his dishonour! There stands the gallant and worshipful Knight Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, of the Order of St. Michael of France, ready to maintain on behalf of Sir William Douglas of Liddesdale, the truth of the charges so advanced. May God defend the right!"

"Amen!" said Father Cyrus, in a loud and solemn tone.

"There stands," proceeded Sir Casimir D'Este, "Magnus Balveny, Captain of the Horse in the service of his feudal lord and master the Earl of Douglas! And there stands Malcolm Seton, a right trusty page in the service of the good Knight Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan! They are to do battle respectively in the same causes and for the same reasons as those which have placed their superiors in hostile antagonism. Therefore again do I say—May God defend the right!"

"Amen!" was once more spoken from the lips of Father Cyrus; and then a dead silence fell upon the scene.

On the one hand the Squires of the Earl of Douglas now presented the shield and spear to their master; while on the other hand Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan received similar ministration from his own Squires. Both the champions closed the visors of their helmets; and as all eyes were fixed upon them, it was easy to perceive that they settled themselves firmly in their saddles. On a sign being given by Sir Casimir D'Este, the trumpets again blew a signal; and this was for the champions to couch their lances. Then, almost immediately, another signal was blown; and both champions, striking the rowels into the flanks of their steeds, dashed against each other in full career. At the same time Magnus Balveny and Malcolm Seton rushed on each other with drawn swords.

There are circumstances in which a thousand conflicting ideas are summed up in the space of a few moments, as if thought itself corruscated in a rapid continuous series of vivid lightnings flashing through the brain. So it was with Margaret and Albertina as they beheld the object of all their interest dashing in full tilt against one of the most

redoubtable warriors of the age. Everywhere around the lists an immense and painful degree of suspense prevailed: but on the part of those who favoured Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, hopefulness suggested that the righteousness of his cause would compensate for his inexperience as a stripling warrior—while the adherents of the Earl of Douglas dreaded lest heaven should weaken his arm and depreciate his energies because of the foul deed of which hardly any one doubted that he was veritably the perpetrator.

Away sped the steeds!—the two champions, with their lances couched, leant forward almost to the saddle-bow, each holding his shield before him to receive the shock; and in a few moments they met with a thundering din. Their steeds reeled backward almost upon their haunches: the shattered flinders of the spears flew about in all directions; and shouts of applause burst from the assemblage,—for it was amongst the highest feats of true chivalry to break the lances at the first encounter. Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan had skilfully raised his shield so as to receive the point of his opponent's spear and thus protect his helmet: but so tremendous was the shock thus sustained; that it made the young Knight reel backward, and for a moment seem as if he were about to fall from his saddle. A deadly pallor seized upon the countenance of Albertina, and she hastily compressed her ashy lips as if to keep back the scream which had risen up into her very throat. A tremor for an instant swept through the frame of Margaret: but in other respects she sat motionless, the complete mistress of her feelings. The temporary apprehension vanished; for the brave young Fleming lost not his seat. On the other hand, the point of Fitz-Allan's lance had been held somewhat low as if he meant to strike in the very midst of his opponent's shield: but just as they were about to close, the young warrior elevated the spear, and glancing from the uppermost part of the Earl's shield it struck him on the visor of the helmet. The visor was completely lifted by the upward tilt of the lance; and so powerful was the shock that the spear fell in shivers to the ground.

To strike the visor in this manner was deemed to be one of the most dexterous feats of chivalry; and thus the instant the eyes of the vast assemblage could perceive the respective results of the first encounter, it was universally admitted that the young Knight had the better of it. On dropping the remnant of his shivered lance, Sir Fleming grasped the handle of his sword: and not more quickly does the eye wink than it flashed from its sheath. At the same moment the Earl of Douglas drew his own sword likewise: but with his left hand loosened for an instant from its hold upon his shield, he endeavoured to close the visor of his helmet. It had however been in some way bent, disordered, or otherwise injured by the shock sustained from the youth's spear; and the visor remained immovably fixed. At a glance Sir Fleming beheld the circumstance; and he exclaimed, "Heed not your visor, my lord! In this way will we fight on equal terms!"—and he at once threw up the aventail of his own helmet.

This chivalrous deed so noble and magnanimous, at once elicited thunders of applause on the part of the crowded assemblage: but the eyes of the Black Douglas flashed fierce fires at the thought that his antagonist should thus find an opportunity of displaying so much knightly courtesy. In a moment their weapons crossed; and now that the combat had drawn them to closest quarters, and that it was hand to hand, man to man, and horse to horse, the most fearfully interesting portion of the conflict was entered upon.

The Earl of Douglas at first calculated upon his herculean strength as the means of overpowering his opponent; and suddenly raising himself in his stirrups, he levelled a tremendous blow at Sir Fleming's head. Had it taken effect, it would have assuredly cut through the steel casque and cloven the head in twain down to the very neck: but the quickness of eagle-sight was in the eyes of the youthful champion—and well aware that such a blow would prove irresistible, even though his shield were raised to receive it, he dexterously wheeled his horse aside, made a complete curve, and then spurring the animal quickly forward, he dealt the Douglas a blow upon the right arm, just as that arm was descending with the sword that had cleaved the air in the space from which the youth had so abruptly glided away. The Earl's armour was proof against the sharpness of Fitz-Allan's weapon: but the violence of the blow for an instant seemed to paralyse the arm, and it was a wonder that the Earl did not drop his sword from his hand. Another instant, however, and that mighty weapon was again upreared—a terrible threat burst from the lips of the Earl—and this time the blow came crashing down upon Sir Fleming's shield; for he had not a moment's leisure to make his steed perform another manœuvre. The shield, broken in twain, fell from Sir Fleming's left arm; and the Earl of Douglas, pressing on to follow up the advantage, aimed another terrific blow at his opponent. Sir Fleming however so skilfully and so successfully parried it that the Earl's brand, sweeping along the opposing blade, struck with a loud clang against the hilt and almost shook the weapon from Sir Fleming's grasp. But the youth retained it; and the next instant he became the assailant in his turn, making his sword play with an almost lightning rapidity hither and thither, upward and downward, cutting and thrusting, and thus for several minutes keeping the Earl continuously engaged in a position of self-defence.

It now became apparent to all the spectators that while the Earl of Douglas had an immense advantage on the score of gigantic strength, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan was by far the more skilful swordsman. He was likewise in every sense more nimble and active; he managed his steed with singular quickness and dexterity: and his entire form appeared elastic and supple in its armour, as if it were a mere silken garb which clothed him;—whereas, on the other hand, the movements of the Earl of Douglas were comparatively slow and heavy, as if his armour prisoned and encumbered him, and likewise as if the motions of his body were utterly deficient in the quality of imparting suppleness and quickness to the movements of his steed. But then the Earl still possessed his shield, while Fleming's was lost; and thus, all things considered, the advantages were either equally balanced, or else slightly preponderating on the side of the Black Douglas.

Everywhere around the lists the most intense anxiety prevailed: with lightning speed did all eyes follow each phase, change, feature, and incident of the combat, which absorbed so much of the general interest that comparatively but little attention was paid to the fight that was being waged on foot between Magnus Balveny and young Seton. Still was this latter combat progressing simultaneously with the other; and there was also this resemblance between them, that Malcolm Seton's superior skill in the art of fence and greater activity of movement countervailed the physical strength and power of arm which characterized Balveny.

"Fight on, brave Knights! beautiful eyes survey your prowess! kerchiefs are waving by fair hands!" These and similar ejaculations were continuously bursting forth from various parts of the crowd,

mingled with an occasional word of encouragement to the inferior pair of combatants,—such as "Ye have stout hearts, good sirs! ye are worthy of the masters whose prowess ye emulate!"

"Hurrah for the Douglas! Glory and honour for the Black Earl!" were the cries which frequently resounded from the lips of that nobleman's retainers, partisans, or supporters.

"Bravely done, gallant Knight! Glory to the youthful chivalry!" were the exclamations which perhaps even still more frequently burst forth in honour of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan from the partisans and followers of the Earl of Caithness.

We need hardly again inform our readers that the intensest anxiety agitated in the bosoms of Albertina and Margaret; and these feelings were still displayed with a more lively effect on the part of the former than on that of the latter. The Earls of Caithness and Bassentyne, as well as the other nobles, knights, and gentlemen who had been invited as guests to Roslin, all grew more hopeful as the combat progressed: while King David himself gave verbal expression to the ideas which the others entertained in silence.

"By St. Andrew, the youthful champion is well skilled in fence!" said the King, whose enthusiastic admiration of the prowess displayed on both sides went on increasing. "His weapon plays like vivid flashes of lightning before the eyes of the Douglas! Ah! now the Black Earl raises his brand! By my sceptre, 'twas well parried, Sir Fleming! And now the youth assumes the offensive again! Bravely does he manage his steed! Well done, Sir Fleming!—that blow hit hard upon the casque of the Douglas!"

Meanwhile the old Knight of Liddesdale, supporting himself on one arm, in his litter, surveyed the martial scene with indescribable interest: the eyes which ere now had seemed to be glazing beneath the cold touch of Death, were lighted up with the fires of mingled anxiety and heroic enthusiasm: the countenance which a little while back appeared to be changing into marble under the ice-breath of the Destroyer, became animated with a hectic glow; and the ejaculations to which ever and anon he gave vent, were in a voice of power and energy.

"Bravely done, Sir Fleming! 'Tis a gallant Knight! He does honour to golden spurs! This display of fence is brilliant! By St. John! my Castle of Hermitage will be his! Heaven itself fights on his side! Father Cyrus, look!—'tis David pitted against Goliath! And the giant will fall! Press on, Sir Fleming! On, on, brave Fitz-Allan! Ah! gallantly done!—follow up that blow! What reck he for the loss of shield? 'Tis valour inimitable!"

Sir Casimir D'Este was also watching the fray with the keen eye of one accustomed to draw pre-sages from the preliminary feats of prowess displayed, so as to estimate what the catastrophe may be; and he likewise was full of hopefulness on young Fitz-Allan's account. But calm and cool sat the Teutonic warrior on his steed, the horse itself remaining perfectly tranquil, as if rider and animal together formed a dark marble statue. The pages and squires of the respective parties rode slowly about the lists, anxiously watching the progress of the two combats, so that they might be ready for the performance of any duty which the results should necessitate.

The Earl of Douglas was infuriate at the delay which he experienced in inflicting (as in his pride and self-sufficiency he was certain of doing) a signal chastisement upon his youthful opponent. He felt that every instant that the combat was prolonged became more and more derogatory to his own honour; and his blood boiled with fury at the idea that his foe should be enabled to act upon the

offensive. He therefore resolved to attempt another tremendous blow which might have the effect of putting an end to the fight at once, even though in dealing it he might himself for the instant be exposed to a rapid onslaught on the part of Fitz-Allan. Letting drop the reins upon his horse's neck, and raising his shield so as to cover himself to the best of his ability, the Black Earl suddenly spurred the animal furiously against Sir Fleming, at whose head he levelled his weapon with all the power of his mighty arm. Quick as thought itself, Fitz-Allan raised his sword to parry the blow: it nevertheless struck his helmet—but its violence was broken by first coming in contact with the youth's sword. Then, the next instant, Sir Fleming made his weapon describe a semicircle over his head; and with a desperate downward cut he struck the Douglas on the shoulder of the sword-arm. Through the plated armour the youth's brand cut its crashing way; the Earl reeled in his saddle—Fitz-Allan spurred his steed with overwhelming force against his opponent's animal—the latter fell back upon its haunches—another well-aimed blow on the youth's part—and down fell the proud Earl of Douglas on the ground!

A tremendous shout of applause burst forth from myriads of lips; but, Oh! how infinite was the relief experienced by the fair Albertina!—how thrilling was the joy which glowed in the heart of Margaret! Light as the fawn bounding down a slope, or as the mountain-goat skipping from a crag, did Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan spring from his steed; and in the twinkling of an eye he strode across the form of the Earl of Douglas, just as the latter was about to raise himself up from the ground. Then, with one foot planted upon the breast of the discomfited nobleman, the heroic youth waved his sword in triumph above his plumed head; and as he thus stood there, in all the natural enthusiasm of his triumph, he presented a spectacle of the noblest personification of Scottish chivalry.

And now came Sir Casimir D'Este, careering upon his steed across the enclosure, attended by his pages, towards the spot where the catastrophe had occurred.

"Well and bravely done, gallant youth!" exclaimed the Teutonic Knight. "But now, as Marshal of the Lists, I claim the Earl of Douglas as my prisoner, convicted as he is by the laws of battle of the foul crime laid to his charge!"

At that very instant a shout of triumph arose on the part of the retainers and supporters of the Earl of Douglas; for the brave but unfortunate Seton, happening to trip, fell upon the grass—and Magnus Balveny, striking him a savage blow, strode across his form, waving his sword in token of triumph.

Incidents were rapidly accumulating in the narrowest space of time, and if not absolutely simultaneous, at least so quickly consecutive, that they left not the smallest interval for the abatement of the general excitement. The Knight of Liddesdale—who throughout the combat had seemed to be galvanised with new life—gave vent to one loud joyous ejaculation when he beheld his kinsman the Black Earl roll from his steed beneath the blows of the youthful champion; and Father Cyrus, crossing himself devoutly, said in a solemn voice, "Heaven has well sustained the arm of the young Knight!"

As he thus spoke, he turned round towards the litter—for he was addressing the words to its veteran occupant; and just at that moment he caught the last flashing of the old Knight's eyes ere the latter fell back and without a groan rendered up his life.

"Peace be to him!—he is no more!" said the monk solemnly; and he instantaneously closed the

curtain of the litter, so as to shut out the corpse from curiosity's prying vision.

There was a momentary sensation of awe on the part of all who were nearest, when those solemnly spoken words on Father Cyrus's part announced that the old Knight of Liddesdale was no more; and then the King, breaking the temporary pause, said, "Holy father, bear the corpse to Melrose—and see that the obsequies be worthy of one whose good qualities shall now only be remembered!"

The monk bowed—the litter began to move away—and King David, again directing his rapid attention towards the lists, exclaimed, "Ah, by St. Andrew! there is alike success and discomfiture on the same side! Sir Fleming is victorious—but his page Seton is vanquished. A difficulty arises, which I in person must look into. Follow me, my lords!"

The King quickly descended from the stand—but not before he had bowed courteously to the ladies and had flung a look of admiration upon the superb Margaret: and he forthwith mounted his steed. The Earls of Caithness and Bassentyne, with several other Peers and Knights, hastened to follow, their own steeds being in readiness close at hand. They were speedily in their saddles—the gates of the lists were flung open—and the King rode at the head of the brilliant cavalcade into the midst of the enclosure. There the position of affairs may be briefly described. The Earl of Douglas had been conveyed to his tent by the attendants of Sir Casimir D'Este, that his armour might be taken off and the severe wound he had received on the right shoulder might be dressed by the surgeon, who was at hand for the purpose. But at the entrance of that tent Sir Casimir D'Este was himself mounting guard; while Sir Fleming, resuming his seat upon his steed, was about to ride towards the spot where his page Seton lay. Balveny still remained astride over the prostrate form of this youth, of whom, according to the law of battle, he could dispose according to his will, and whose life he might take without incurring the imputation of cowardice.

The King, at the head of the cavalcade was now galloping into the lists; and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan met the *cortege*.

"Gallant Knight," exclaimed David, "thou hast borne thyself most valiantly this morn; and thou shalt henceforth wear thy spurs in honour of St. Andrew of Scotland as well as of St. Michael of France! Come with us."

Fitz-Allan bowed and obeyed; and as he rode along with the cavalcade, he received rapid but fervid congratulations from the Earl of Caithness and other friends. Towards the spot where Magnus Balveny was still astride over the prostrate form of young Seton, did the *cortege* proceed; and the King, reining in his charger, demanded, "How mean you to treat that vanquished youth?"

"Life for life, or death for death, sire!" answered Balveny, with a stern ferocious doggedness, as he drew his dagger from its sheath. "If my noble master the Earl of Douglas be given to the headman or the gibbet, young Seton dies! If the Douglas live, Seton shall be spared! What is the decision of the King?"

"Wretch!" ejaculated Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, spurring his horse forward: "so foul a deed—"

"Hold!" exclaimed the King: "it is for me to arbitrate in this matter! On the one hand the ordeal of battle has proven the Earl of Douglas to be an assassin: on the other hand it has acquitted Magnus Balveny. But what was the charge laid by the Knight of Liddesdale? That master and man did jointly and together assail him. If therefore the Douglas be guilty, how can Balveny be innocent? Or again, if Balveny be innocent, how

can the Douglas be guilty? Riddle me this, my lords!"

There was perplexity depicted upon every countenance, and not a syllable was spoken. The King was anxious to save the life of the Earl of Douglas, so as to avoid making enemies of the powerful family to which he belonged; and he hastened to take advantage of the bewilderment which his last speech had excited.

"The ordeal of battle," he resumed, "has evidently proved false in one sense——"

"Sire," ejaculated Sir Fleming, "I proclaim the Earl of Douglas to be an assassin——"

"My young friend," interrupted the monarch, "do you wish to behold your faithful page Seton murdered in cold blood, by that fierce Borderer, before your very eyes?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the youthful Knight enthusiastically. "Seton must live!"

"And that he may live, the Douglas must likewise live!" responded the King. "Heard you not the terms enunciated by the pitiless Magnus Balveny? Then let it be so! Our decision is given. Balveny, our royal word is pledged! Your master is spared: let Seton be saved!"

"Willingly, sire:—and Magnus Balveny strode away from the prostrate form of the youth, who in a half senseless condition was now raised from the ground by Sir Fleming; for the young Knight sprang from his steed for the purpose.

"Let the proclamation be made of the royal decision!" said the King, in a tone which showed that he would not brook a single syllable of remonstrance: and then, suddenly altering his voice to accents of the blandest courtesy, he turned to the Earl of Caithness, adding, "And now, my lord, I will become a self-invited guest in the banqueting-hall of your castle."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LISTS.

THE scene which we have described at the close of the preceding chapter, took place with a rapidity which prevented the Earl of Caithness or any of his companion nobles from offering a single syllable of comment. Indeed, as we have stated, they were perplexed by that subtle reasoning which the King adduced as a pretext for saving the life of the Earl of Douglas; and before they could well recover from their bewilderment, the affair was finished—the King's judgment was made known—and the trumpeters were already beginning to proclaim the royal decision.

"My poor Seton!" said Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, sustaining the vanquished page in his arms: "cheer up! You fought valiantly—I have already heard numerous voices declare the fact: and if your foot had not made that luckless trip, it would it have fared with Magnus Balveny!"

"Oh, my gallant young master!" exclaimed Malcolm Seton, now completely recovering himself; "what laurels have you gained! but what disgrace has fallen upon me!"—and the tears gushed out from the youth's eyes.

"Disgrace? No! by heaven it is not so!" cried Fitz-Allan. "I repeat, you fought so valiantly that henceforth all men will respect your courage!"

"And I echo the assurance!" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness. "Thou art a brave youth, Malcolm—and none can gainsay thy valour!"

King David, with his usual dexterity of mind, saw that this was a favourable opportunity for saying

something generous—or at least apparently so—and putting into a good humour those who might be disposed to cavil at the decision which he had just rendered. He therefore exclaimed, "What! weeping, good youth? By St. Andrew! proud smiles ought to be upon your lip; for all who had eyes to see, know full well that the victory was your own, had it not been for that ill chance which made your foot stumble! Cheer up therefore!—it is your King who proclaims that you have acted worthily this morn!"

Such a speech from the lips of Royalty, in an age when a certain degree of sacredness invested the crown, no matter by whom worn, was sufficient to dispel the clouds of grief from Seton's countenance and render it all beaming with joy. The grateful youth threw himself on his knees before the monarch's steed, and murmured forth broken syllables of thankfulness.

"Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan," exclaimed David, "wear this chain for my sake! And you, Malcolm Seton, carry in your belt this dirk as a token of your Sovereign's approval and favour. Rise, youth—rise!"

While thus speaking, the King presented a massive gold chain to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and a richly chased dagger to the young page, both of whom received the gifts with suitable obeisances and acknowledgments.

"And now," cried the King, "let largesse be distributed amongst the multitude. 'What, ho! Lindsay—Crawford—Wardlaw—Boyd!—where be your purses?'"

It was thus David summoned some of his own personal retainers, who immediately pressed forward at the royal bidding: and receiving the requisite instructions, they forthwith began galloping round the lists, flinging handfuls of small coin over the barriers amongst the crowded assemblage. The royal decision in reference to the Earl of Douglas was already being proclaimed: murmurs of disapprobation were arising on the part of many persons; but these were now quickly drowned in the cries that burst forth, "Long live the King! Glory to our generous King! Honour to the son of the great Bruce!"

It was thus by several little strokes of policy, but all rapidly accomplished, that David disarmed resentment, stifled disapprobation, and even won approval. As a matter of course, the retainers and partisans of the Earl of Douglas himself were loud and enthusiastic in the shouts with which they welcomed the royal decision; and thus in a few minutes it seemed as if David had accomplished a deed which was all but universally popular.

Meanwhile Sir Casimir D'Este remained motionless on his steed at the entrance of the tent to which the Earl of Douglas had been borne: for he thought it probable that the fierce Borderers who were present outside the barriers, might attempt a rescue of their vanquished chief—in which case the redoubtable Teutonic Knight was resolved that he would keep possession of his prisoner so long as he had power to wield his weapon. He was at too great a distance from the spot where the Royal cavalcade had halted, to hear what took place: he beheld young Seton raised up from the ground by Sir Fleming, and Magnus Balveny hasten away; but it was not until the trumpeters began making proclamation that Sir Casimir D'Este understood the compromise which had been effected. Rage for a moment took possession of him; and he mentally ejaculated, "By St. Jude! this is too flagrant! The Royalty of Scotland plays pranks which are intolerable!"

But another moment's reflection showed Sir Casi-

mir that after all it was indeed the only course which the King could adopt, as being apparently consistent with common sense, as it was assuredly most in accordance with humanity for young Seton's sake. The results of the two combats had proved the Earl of Douglas guilty and Magnus Balveny innocent: but this inconsistency was in contradiction with the very accusation on which the two combats had been waged—namely, that Douglas and Balveny together had attempted the same crime of assassination. Thus, though there was every moral certitude upon the point, the results of the appeal to arms had left what might be termed a legal doubt; and of this doubt, under all circumstances, it was proper that the Earl of Douglas should have the benefit. Moreover, the salvation of young Seton's life had been rendered dependent on the safety of the Earl; and Sir Casimir said to himself, "Better is it that even a villain like the Black Douglas should escape, than that as the condition of his punishment a chivalrous youth like Seton should be sacrificed!"

Having rapidly revolved all these things in his mind, Sir Casimir D'Este alighted from his steed and entered the tent, where he found the Black Earl disencumbered of his armour, and attended by his pages; while the surgeon was dressing his wounds. A fierce sombre scowl sat upon the swarthy features of the discomfited nobleman: it was an expression indescribably dark, gloomy, and portentous. The nature of the proclamation which was being made had already been communicated to him—but he had listened in moody silence: his proud heart was wrung by the thought that the hitherto unconquered Douglas had been borne to the ground by a stripling arm, before the gaze of a vast assemblage!

"My lord," said Sir Casimir D'Este, as he entered the tent—and he spoke with a cold severity,— "it is his Majesty's will that you be freed from all the consequences, so far as human laws are concerned, of your recent defeat. Whether or not you have an account to settle with your conscience, you best know. Your kinsman, according to the rumour which has just reached me, is no more——"

At this instant Magnus Balveny burst into the tent, exclaiming, "Oh, my noble master! fortune has played you a sorry game to-day!"

"But the star of the Douglas shall yet be in the ascendant," said the Black Earl, bending fierce sullen looks on Sir Casimir D'Este; "and there shall yet be vengeance against those who by deed or word have displayed a hostile bearing!"

"I know not whom you threaten, my lord," said the Teutonic Knight, with the noblest dignity of mien: "but if the menace be intended for my ears, I hold it as lightly as Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan may now account the chivalry of Douglas."

A sound expressive of rage, resembling the half stifled growl of a wounded wild beast, came from the Earl's lips at this taunt: but Sir Casimir D'Este, disdainingly bestowing any further attention on the nobleman, issued from the tent and remounted his horse.

"Are the wounds serious, my lord?" hastily inquired Balveny.

"Mere scratches," responded the Earl; "and in a few days not even the scars will be left."

"By St. Bride of Bothwell, 'tis well!" ejaculated Balveny; "for if I mistake not, there will be sharp work for us all upon the Borders!"

"What mean you, Magnus?" demanded the Earl.

"The rumour has just reached me, my lord," replied Balveny, "that the Knight of Liddesdale——"

"I already know it," interjected the Earl: "he

is no more—and the estates of Teviotdale and Liddesdale are mine!"

"Your's, my lord, so long as you can hold them by force of arms," rejoined Balveny quickly,— "which I hope will be for ever! But it was not precisely your kinsman's death which I came to communicate: it is the rumour that only reached my ears a few minutes back, when having granted young Seton his life, I spoke to a few of our partisans on my way hither——"

"And that rumour, Magnus?" demanded the Earl impatiently; "what is it? Speak, speak, man!"

"'Tis said, my lord—and I believe only too truly—that while there was that delay soon after the King's arrival, and when the litter containing your lordship's kinsman drew up in front of the principal stand,—'tis said, I repeat——"

"Now, by St. Bride! will you come to the point, Magnus?" vociferated the Earl, whose soul was terribly chafed and irritated. "You are playing with my patience——"

"Not so, my lord. I at once come to the point. 'Tis said, then, that during that delay which I have specified, the Knight of Liddesdale willed and bequeathed his estates, including his Border Castle, to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan."

"What?" exclaimed the Douglas, starting up from his seat with such sudden violence that the surgeon retreated a few steps in terror, dropping his lint and bandages. "But this is ridiculous! The heritage is inalienably my right!—a thousand such wills are but as worthless rags and tatters—for the King only——"

"My lord," interposed Balveny solemnly, "the King has given his assent—the bequeathment is legalized—the royal sign manual is appended to the writing—the estates of Teviotdale and Liddesdale belong to the Fitz-Allan!"

For a moment the Earl of Douglas literally reeled and staggered with the fury that had seized upon him at this announcement: but suddenly collecting himself, he exclaimed in a voice of thunder, "Never!"

Then followed a dead silence in the tent for nearly a minute—during which the Earl of Douglas stood with folded arms and fiercely scowling countenance, the personification of all the evil passions which render humanity deplorable or which might make Lucifer himself terrible.

"Never!" the Earl at length repeated, in a tone that was lower but not a whit the less energetic than that in which he had first ejaculated the word. "The King of Scotland himself shall not wield this power over the Douglas. To horse, my men! Muster our partisans, Balveny! Ride quick to Hermitage! Spare not steed, stint not spur, and draw not bridle until my mandate be thither borne! It is that the Earl of Douglas will hold the Castle of Hermitage though David himself with all his armies come against it! Speed, Magnus! I follow anon!"

Balveny bowed, and at once issued from the tent.

"Hasten and finish with these bandages, Sir Leech! Assist him, ye lazy varlets!" continued the Douglas, thus addressing the surgeon first, and then his pages; and he spoke with terrible fierceness, as if having cause of anger against all around. "Be quick, I say!—and let me don my armour again!"

"Your armour, my lord?" said the mediciner, meekly and timidly. "Permit me, with all possible respect, to observe to your lordship that if the wound on the shoulder be chafed—at least I mean for a day or two—serious consequences—inflammation and mortification——"

"Ah! is it so?" demanded the Earl, who was not so completely blinded by rage as to be utterly reckless of his own personal safety. "Now answer me, Sir Leech! May I in easy costume ride hence to the Border?"

"You may, my lord—provided it be also by easy stages; for 'tis a good fifty miles from hence to the Castle of Hermitage," was the surgeon's response.

"Well, be it then by easy stages!" exclaimed the Earl. "And now again, answer me, Sir Leech! Provided I thus far fulfil your injunctions, when may I again don my steel panoply?—and when will this arm be fit to wield a weapon?"

"In a few days, my lord," replied the mediciner: "let us say a week at the outside."

"Tush! a week!" ejaculated the Earl. "By St. Bride! if there be work to do in the meantime, this right arm of mine shall be raised to do it!"

We must now return to Sir Casimir D'Este, who on issuing from the tent, had remounted his steed that he might advance to pay his respects to the King of Scotland. The monarch awaited the Knight's approach; and as the warrior drew near, David exclaimed, "Welcome, Sir Casimir! We have heard of your prowess the other morning; and although it was displayed against the persons of some of our subjects, yet we cannot but admire, and therefore chide not, the deed! How rare it with the Earl of Douglas?"

"I have communicated your Majesty's proclamation," responded Sir Casimir; "and have signified to the Earl that he is free."

"Doubtless he chafes at his defeat?" said the King.

"The Black Douglas, sire," rejoined the Teutonic Knight, "wears not the aspect of a nobleman who can endure aught with seemly patience."

"I shall presently find an occasion," said the King, "to have farther speech with you, Sir Casimir. Ah! by the way," he inquired, with an air of half-carelessness, "you doubtless failed not to recognise the necessity under which we laboured to spare the Earl of Douglas?"

"Sire," answered the Teutonic Knight, "I perceive that necessity."

"And now," cried King David, "let us approach yonder amphitheatre; for doubtless this brave young champion"—glancing with a smile towards Fitz-Allan—"is anxious to receive the meed of praise from the eyes of Beauty?"

While the cavalcade rode towards the great stand, the Earl of Caithness informed Sir Casimir D'Este of the bequeathment made by the Knight of Liddesdale and to which the royal assent had been given. It was however only in a conversational way that the Earl thus made the communication; for little did he suspect the kinship which existed between Sir Casimir and the Fitz-Allans—or little did he imagine that the Teutonic Knight was as well acquainted with the private history of the orphans as was the Earl himself. Nevertheless, the Earl could not help thinking that it was with a strange expression of countenance Sir Casimir received the intelligence, and that there was some degree of coldness in the tone in which he curtly said, "I will presently offer my congratulations to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan."

Lord Caithness could not possibly conjecture why the Knight spoke with such an air of indifference: but the subject was speedily banished from his mind amidst the scenes of bustle which were to characterize the next few hours of the day.

The cavalcade rode towards the great stand, amidst the flourish of trumpets and the continuous outburst of enthusiastic shouts on the part of the

crowd. Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, as the victorious champion, rode forward and bowed his plumed head to the assemblage in the stand. With what pride and admiration did the ambitious Margaret contemplate her chivalrous brother!—with what a fluttering heart, and with what glowing blushes, did the beauteous Albertina bend her sweet blue eyes upon her lover! Were it not for the general excitement that prevailed, those blushes and those looks on the high-born damsel's part would have proved a tell-tale revelation of the secret love which her soul cherished. But the eyes of all the ladies present were fixed upon Sir Fleming; and towards him were crowding many of the noblest peers and most gallant knights of Scotland to proffer their congratulations on the glory he had achieved.

Meanwhile Magnus Balveny had hastily mustered his partisans; and he was soon on his way, in a southerly direction, for the Castle of Hermitage. In less than half-an-hour afterwards the Earl of Douglas, dressed in a travelling-suit, and with his right arm in a sling, was proceeding in the same direction, attended by his pages—but at a slower pace than that adopted by Balveny's precursory party.

The crowds began to melt away from the vicinage of the lists; while numerous steeds and palfreys were brought forward by splendidly-dressed grooms and pages; and there was now a general mounting into saddles on the part of the nobles and ladies who were to banquet within the walls of Roslin Castle. From the plain the brilliant cavalcade descended into the glen; the stone bridge was crossed—the gate of Roslin was entered—and up into the court-yard went the long procession. In the meanwhile Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan had learnt from the Earl of Caithness a few hurried details, and from his sister some additional particulars, in reference to the bequeathment made by the perished Knight of Liddesdale: but for the present we must defer any description of the effect produced on our youthful hero's mind by this announcement.

The banqueting-hall in Roslin Castle was arranged with three long tables, laid out in the most splendid manner known to that age and to the existing civilization. After some changes of toilet had been made in the chambers to which the guests were respectively shown, the company proceeded to the spacious hall where the grand festival was to take place. The walls of the immense apartment were hung with suits of armour, martial weapons, the antlers of deer, and other emblems of war and of the chase. Banners, pendant to sloping lances, appeared at short intervals; and the whole array of these spears, from point to point, was a series of festooning flowers. For the instant the tidings of Fitz-Allan's victory had been conveyed to Roslin, the active and intelligent steward Hepburn ordered these floral decorations to be suspended,—a cheerful substitute indeed for the sable hangings that would have been brought into requisition if the youthful Knight had fallen! But he had conquered—and all was joy within the walls of Roslin.

According to the court etiquette of that period, the King was accustomed on all such occasions as these to eat apart from the general company, having with him only the highest dignitaries of his household. Thus his Majesty was now escorted by the Earl of Caithness to the head of the table which stood on the right hand side of the hall; and there David seated himself, with some dozen of his principal retainers. Between the royal party and the huge salt-cellar in the middle of the long table, there was consequently left a considerable interval: but below the salt-cellar the guests thronged at that part of the lengthy board. The Earl of Caith.

ness seated himself at the head of the central table—having on one hand his daughter Albertina and the Earl of Bassentyne, while on the other hand sat Margaret and Fleming. Below, on either side of the table, numerous guests placed themselves—male and female alternating with the usual propriety of courteous arrangement. At the head of the third table Sir Casimir D'Este presided, not only in his capacity of Marshal of the Lists, but also as a guest towards whom the Earl of Caithness sought to display distinguishing honour. The feast itself consisted of all the luxuries which the earth, the air, and the water could furnish,—flesh, fowl, and fish in the most liberal profusion. The wine was supplied with a corresponding hospitality; and countless pages in elegant costumes attended upon the company.

Though the Earl of Bassentyne sat next to the Lady Albertina, yet often were his looks flung furtively across the board at the superb Margaret: and she, with her natural keenness of perception, failed not to notice the circumstance, though by her manner she affected to perceive it not. The King likewise flung frequent looks towards the upper extremity of the central table: but whether they were intended particularly to survey Albertina of herself—or whether they were merely cast in an indifferent way for the purpose of seeing how the gaiety progressed in that quarter—Margaret did not know.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ABBOT'S LETTER.

THE banquet which had commenced soon after the hour of noon, terminated at about three o'clock, for the King was compelled to take his departure, he having important affairs which required his presence in the evening at Edinburgh. He said not a syllable to the Earl of Caithness in reference to the bequeathment made by the Knight of Liddesdale: it was one of those matters which David deemed it politic to leave to take its own course, at least for the present. He said a few words apart to the Teutonic Knight—but these it is not necessary to record in this place. He made at leave-taking a last complimentary speech to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan for the prowess which he had displayed in the morning: and he in graceful language expressed to Albertina and Margaret particularly, and to the ladies generally, his regret at being compelled to separate so soon from such fair company. He forgot not to throw in a word to the effect that this was one of the sacrifices he so often found himself forced to make on behalf of his regal duties towards his beloved Scotland; and before he rode out of the court-yard he distributed coin freely with his own hand amongst the assembled retainers of the Earl of Caithness. In a word, the wily Monarch flattered himself that he had this day passed with consummate skill through several positions of difficulty—that he had popularized himself with the masses gathered at the lists—and that he had made a most favourable impression upon all whom he left behind at Roslin Castle.

The King's departure was the signal for most of the guests to take their leave likewise; and thus by five o'clock in the evening the occupants of the state drawing-room were limited to the Earl of Caithness and his daughter, Fleming and Margaret Fitz-Allan, the Earl of Bassentyne, and the Teutonic Knight. Sir Casimir D'Este conceiving that the Earl of Caithness might wish to deliberate with the Fitz-Allans as soon as possible on the subject of the deceased Knight of Liddesdale's bequeathment,

invited the Earl of Bassentyne to ramble with him through the pleasure-grounds attached to the castle. The young nobleman complied; and the Earl of Caithness remained in the drawing-room with his daughter and the Fitz-Allans.

Sir Casimir had rightly conjectured that Lord Caithness was desirous of touching on the important topic with the least possible delay; and accordingly, no sooner had the door closed behind the Teutonic Knight and Lord Bassentyne, than the Earl said, "We have now a grave matter for our deliberation."

"Yes—grave indeed, my noble benefactor!" said Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan; "for full well do I comprehend to what your lordship alludes. There are the estates which I may step forward to claim—but here am I," he added bitterly, "the scion of a proscribed race—compelled to exist under a feigned name—incurring the direst penalties if it were known that my foot rests on Scottish soil—and incompetent as an outlaw to lift up a handful of Scottish dust and call it my own! How, then, shall I dare put forward a claim to those broad lands in Teviotdale and Liddesdale, and to that proud castle on the bank of the river Hermitage?"

"It is indeed a difficult point to be settled," said the Earl of Caithness, his countenance wearing an expression of deep and painful thought. "If you assert not your claim, the world will say that the Earl of Caithness fears to back you against the powerful and mighty Douglas; and this must not be said of me! On the other hand—"

"On the other hand," exclaimed Fleming bitterly, as he took up his benefactor's speech, "if I do claim those broad lands, and if I gain possession of them, the Earl of Douglas would ask, 'Who is this hitherto unknown youth that has deprived me of my heritage?'—and then that question loudly proclaimed by the chief, would set all his servile and willing hangers-on at the busy task of making inquiries; and who can tell but that the chapter of accidents might turn up something to furnish a clue and ultimately lead to the elucidation of the secret?"

Margaret sat listening to this conversation with the deepest inward uneasiness; for she dreaded lest the result of the discussion should be the abandonment of her brother's claim to large estates and a baronial castle, the possession of which would enable him to seek without the impute of presumption the hand of the Lady Albertina Roslin. There was a brief pause in the discourse; and it was broken by Margaret, who inquired in a low but earnest tone, "Does your lordship believe that it is utterly impossible to procure the revocation of that terrible decree of the Black Parliament?"

"It would be cruel as well as useless, my dear young friends," replied the Earl of Caithness, with a sad expression of countenance, "to buoy you up with a hope of whose realization I perceive no earthly chance!"

"Then perish all my claims to the estates and castle bequeathed by the dead Knight!" cried Fleming fervidly. "It is not for myself I speak—because I would dare everything—and I know that my sister likewise would dare everything—"

"Yes, yes," said Margaret, with nervous agitation.

"But it is for your sake, my noble benefactor! my more than father!" continued Fitz-Allan, seizing the Earl's hand, "that these claims shall be abandoned! I would sooner perish than implicate you in whatsoever difficulties or dangers might overtake myself! And in abandoning these claims I will do it in a manner which shall prevent the world from daring to assert the calumny that the



No. 7.—MARGARET.

Earl of Caithness ventures not to cope with the proud Douglas on my behalf: I will plead that I labour under some vow against the acquirement of riches—or I will assert a feigned reluctance to accept so vast a boon from one who was a stranger—I will do anything sooner than compromise your lordship and the daughter whom you so dearly love!”

“Generous youth!” exclaimed the Earl, embracing Fitz-Allan with as much warmth as if they stood in the relationship of father and son.

Albertina had surveyed the young Knight with looks of admiration until her eyes had become dimmed with tears; for her sensitive nature was deeply affected by a generosity of conduct which was even calculated to move dispositions that were callous and worldly-minded. As for Margaret, she bit her lip with vexation; but fortunately for her sake this little display of selfishness passed unnoticed.

“No, my dear boy!” continued the Earl of Caithness; “this noble sacrifice shall not be made entirely for my sake! If it be needful to make it at all, it shall be only on considerations personal to yourself and Margaret. We will come to no hasty conclusion—we will think over the matter—”

At this instant the door of the apartment opened; and a page entered bearing a letter, which, as the menial stated, had just been delivered by a messenger who had ridden fleet and fast from Melrose Abbey. The missive was secured with a silken string and a seal; and it was addressed thus:—“To the high and mighty Peer the Earl of Caithness, Baron of Roslin, and Lord of the Orkney Islands—these in haste! Ride, ride, until they be delivered!”

The page withdrew: the Earl opened the letter—and as he glanced at its contents, he ejaculated, “Ah, by my troth! the missive bears relation to the very points we were mooting!”

He then read the document, the contents of which ran as follow:—

“Benedictus, by the Divine Grace Abbot and Prior of Melrose, to the Earl of Caithness, Greeting.

“Whereas, through the information brought us by our well beloved the devout and reverend Father Cyrus, a brother of this Priory, we have learnt of certain bequeathments this day made by the whilom Sir William Douglas, Knight of Liddesdale—and whereas in our friendly interest towards the young warrior the good Knight Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, we have certain salutary counsel to give touching and concerning the said bequeathment—we earnestly pray and enjoin that no step be taken in the enforcement of the claims now established to the estates of the umquhile Knight of Liddesdale, until we shall have leisure to send further communications, or do that which may seem needful in our eyes. And this shall be done within the space of a few days from the date hereof. We invoke blessings upon the heads of those beneath the roof of the noble Castle of Roslin.

“† BENEDICTUS.”

“This is strange!” ejaculated the Earl of Caithness; “but perhaps even more important than singular! The Abbot of Melrose is not a man to trifle with matters, nor to meddle in concerns through the midst of which he hath not a clear perception. The aid which he seems to promise will therefore prove most valuable. I will send his reverend lordship a suitable reply, promising him that we will await further communications. Come, Albertina—you shall pen the response for me!”

The Earl of Caithness, though much better educated than most of the Scottish peers of that time, was nevertheless but an indifferent penman; and

thus, whenever it was needful to enter into epistolary correspondence, the chaplain or his daughter acted as his secretary. But the chaplain was not now present; and therefore it was of Albertina's services that the nobleman proceeded to avail himself. They retired together to an apartment where there were writing materials: Fleming and Margaret remained alone in the drawing-room.

“Heaven send, my dear brother,” said Margaret, the instant the door closed behind the Earl and Albertina, “that you may obtain possession of these estates, and that you be not called upon to make the sacrifice of your claims!”

“Doubtless, my dear sister,” replied Fleming, who in his fraternal love was blinded to the selfishness of Margaret's disposition,—“doubtless it were infinitely preferable to succeed than to fail: but we must resign ourselves to the latter alternative if our position continue to be such as to render success impossible.”

“Perhaps, Fleming, I could tell you something,” said Margaret, “which would more than ever prove to you the necessity of risking almost everything—”

“What do you mean, dearest sister?” exclaimed Fleming. “There is in your words—yes, and likewise in your looks—a degree of meaning—”

“Listen, Fleming!” interrupted Margaret gravely: “listen to something which I have known ever since the morning when those momentous incidents occurred at the inn—but I could not tell you before—No, not for worlds would I have said aught to distress your mind, standing as you were upon the threshold of a deadly combat!”

“For heaven's sake speak, Margaret!” exclaimed Fleming: “you almost frighten me!”

“Nay—there is nothing to be frightened at,” responded his sister, a trifle more cheerfully: “for who that aspires to climb to a great height can hope to ascend it as easily as if he were walking on level ground? No!—the bold spirit is prepared before-hand for certain obstacles; and therefore he is not frightened when they present themselves—but he does his best to hurl them down and clear them from his path.”

“There is sound sense in your words, Margaret,” said Fleming, half puzzled what to think, and yet half suspicious of the channel in which her thoughts were flowing. “But pray be explicit! You are keeping me in suspense!”

“In a word, Fleming,” rejoined Margaret, “I would speak to you of Albertina.”

“Ah!” ejaculated the youth; for the half-suspicion which he had conceived was now confirmed. “You will not tell me that her love has undergone any change—”

“Change? No!” emphatically answered Margaret. “That love of her's has, if possible, been enhanced into worship by the grand deed which you have this day performed, and with which Scotland will soon ring from end to end! But though Albertina loves you, yet her father knows not—”

“True,” exclaimed Fleming, pressing his hand to his brow: “and I almost feel as if I had been guilty of a crime in thus loving his daughter in secret, without frankly and boldly avowing it. But it was your advice, Margaret—”

“I know it, Fleming,” responded his sister: “it was the advice suggested by prudence—and I cannot regret that I gave it. Yet listen!—one word explains all! Know you wherefore the Earl of Bassentyne is here? You are startled—it is nevertheless the truth—to that young nobleman is the hand of Albertina promised by her sire!”

Fleming Fitz-Allan staggered and became very

pale: the fond fervid hope which he had more than ever cherished since his gallant achievement of the morning, seemed to be suddenly blighted within him.

"Despair not, my dearest brother!" Margaret hastened to exclaim: "despair not!—for there are many chances in your favour!"

"Ah! say you so?" ejaculated the youth, again clutching wildly at the hope which an instant before appeared to be gliding away from him like the floating spar from the grasp of the shipwrecked mariner.

"Yes—many chances!" repeated Margaret emphatically. "In the first place Albertina loves you: in the second place you have become famous, and already worthy by knightly prowess of aspiring to be an Earl's son-in-law—"

"But does not Lord Bassentyne love Albertina?" inquired Fleming, with feverish anxiety.

A slight flush flitted across Margaret's features; and it was in a somewhat altered voice that she said, "No. I am confident he does not."

"Ah! then this is the best chance of success on my part!" exclaimed Fleming. "But—"

"And now therefore, my dear brother," continued Margaret, speaking rapidly, as if to escape from the embarrassment into which she had been temporarily thrown a few instants back when she expressed her conviction that the Earl of Bassentyne did not love Albertina—"you must perceive the necessity of rendering your position as excellent as possible—you must not lightly sacrifice the broad lands and the stately castle bequeathed you by the perished Knight of Liddesdale—"

"Hush!" suddenly ejaculated Fleming: "footsteps are advancing! Let us be calm."

The Earl and his daughter now returned to the room: the brother and sister at once composed their features; and as the party was shortly afterwards joined by the Teutonic Knight and the Earl of Bassentyne, the conversation turned upon general topics. Throughout the remainder of that evening Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan watched the demeanour of the Earl of Bassentyne towards Albertina; and he thought from this survey he had reason to believe that his sister was right in the assurance she had given him; yet on the other hand he failed to perceive aught which might lead him to imagine that the young nobleman's affections were rapidly flowing in another channel.

It was eleven o'clock at night; and Fleming Fitz-Allan was alone in his chamber. Half-an hour had elapsed since he retired thither; and yet not the slightest preparation had he made towards seeking his couch. He was evidently awaiting some one; for while seated in a pensive mood at the table, on which his elbow rested, with his hand supporting his head, he ever and anon listened as if he caught the sound of footsteps in the stone corridor. At length he heard in reality the expected tread which hitherto he had only heard in fancy: the door opened—and a somewhat grim-looking man made his appearance. He was an elderly person, partly dressed in armour; and he had a martial look. His name was Redman; and he was lieutenant of Roslin Castle. In times of peace he had scarcely any duty to perform: but in periods of trouble he acted as commandant of the garrison. He now carried a bunch of keys in one hand, and a torch (which was not however lighted) in the other.

"Thanks, my good friend!" exclaimed Fleming, hastening towards the lieutenant,—“thanks for this punctuality, as well as for the readiness with which you consented to gratify my whim!”

"I am sure, Sir Fleming," answered Redman, who was blunt and good-humoured—a practised

warrior, but not otherwise particularly bright or lively in his intellect—"every one must be anxious to render you a service: for though you do not actually belong to the family by blood and kinship, yet do we all look upon you as if you were a Roslin; and your deeds shed honour upon the Earl's house. After all, it is no great favour you have demanded—"

"Come then, worthy Redman," said Fitz-Allan; "and let us proceed noiselessly. Shall we take the lamp with us?"

"Yes: for we will light the torch at the top of the stone steps in the chapel. The lamp would shed a ray too feeble to throw out the features of the vaults; and it is for this reason I have brought the torch in readiness."

Fleming took the lamp in his hand: he and Redman then threaded the stone corridor—they diverged into another passage—and they reached a high arched door at the extremity. This door was opened by one of the keys on the bunch which Redman carried: they crossed the threshold—and the lieutenant relocked the door behind them. They were now in the chapel, or oratorio, of the castle. The place was high and spacious: there were two altars, handsomely decorated; the pulpit and the seats were formed of a wood so dark that they seemed as if made of ebony. The moon was dimly shining through the tall narrow windows; but its rays were sufficiently powerful to make the lamp, pale into sickness.

Redman led the way across the chapel, and opened a low narrow door deeply set in a sort of recess. Though from his childhood Fleming had known that this door led down into the vaults, yet the thought which now flashed into his mind had never struck him before.

"How is it possible," he asked, "that those deceased scions of the family who were buried in coffins, as well as the vast marble monuments sculptured to their memory, could be borne through this narrow opening?"

"They were not," answered Redman. "This is the private entrance for the priests when descending into the vaults to pray for the souls of the departed or to light tapers over their resting-places. Is it possible that intimately acquainted as you are with Roslin, you have never known or that you have forgotten—"

"Ah! I remember," said the youth. "that large dark arched entrance in the corridor at the bottom of the flight of steps at the other extremity of the wing—"

"Yes," rejoined Redman, "that is the main entrance into the vaults. But Hepburn the steward keeps the key of that gate—"

"It is a matter of no consequence," observed the young Knight, "by which means of access we reach the vaults."

The Lieutenant now lighted the torch; and leaving the lamp just within the doorway at the head of the stone steps, he began the descent. Fleming followed; and in a few moments they were in the solemn, gloomy, sepulchral subterranean of Roslin Castle.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VAULTS.

THE reader may perhaps have been somewhat surprised at a remark which Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan made to Redman, respecting some of the deceased scions of the Roslin family who were buried in

coffins, as if he meant to infer that other members of the same race had been consigned coffinless to those vaults. And such indeed was precisely what our young hero *did* mean; and in his allusion he was pointing to nothing more nor less than a literal fact.

The subterranean beneath the oratorio was divided into three compartments, separated by massive iron gratings, the bars of which crossed diagonally and were so close together that they formed as it were a veritable network of iron. In the middle of each barrier were two large stone pillars, between which were ponderous doors covered with iron knobs or nails; and there were two pass-keys—one being in possession of the steward Hepburn, the other being attached to the bunch which was in the keeping of the lieutenant Redman.

In the first compartment to which our young hero and Redman descended, were several monuments, some of stone and others of marble, raised to the memory of different scions of the Roslin family, which was a very ancient one and whose lineage could be traced back to the earliest periods of Scottish history. Rude and uncouth indeed were the sculptured effigies of warriors in armour and ladies in their robes on which now fell the light of the torch borne in Redman's hand; while in respect to some of the oldest monuments, time had reduced almost to shapeless blocks the marble on which the sculptor's art had been laboriously exercised. A solemn silence prevailed in that subterranean; but there were loopholes high up, which admitted the fresh air; and thus there was no noxious vapour nor offensive odour. The application of this remark will be better understood when we inform our readers that in the second compartment of the subterranean eight scions of the Roslin family had been stretched coffinless on as many marble slabs arranged for the purpose. Those eight warriors had there been laid, each clothed in the armour which in his lifetime he had been accustomed to wear. There they had been stretched out on their marble resting-places, just as if they were reposing each upon the couch where he died! A strange spectacle was it which Fleming Fitz-Allan thus contemplated. In his boyhood he had once or twice visited those vaults: but he had not *then* lingered for any length of time to inspect the relics of humanity which lay stretched in that secluded compartment—for at that boyish age the superstitious feeling was strong and his young blood had congealed in horror at the thought of being in such close vicinage with the dead. But *now* it was different. A curiosity of a solemn and manly nature possessed him; and although the object of his present visit to the subterranean was not to inspect either the monuments in the first compartment or the forms of the coffinless warriors in the second, yet did he avail himself of the opportunity to become better acquainted with the subterranean mysteries of Roslin Castle.

It was curious to note the effects of time's progress in that second compartment, by the study of the array of eight forms which lay there, like sculptured effigies, on the marble slabs where they respectively reposed. A century had elapsed since the first of those corpses was deposited there; and some fourteen or fifteen years since the last was stretched on his marble bed beneath the vaulted roof of that subterranean. The others had been laid out there at different intermediate dates. Each had been carefully embalmed, according to a particular secret which was treasured in the family; and thus, as the decay of mortality had gradually taken place, it was unaccompanied by the exhalations of noxious gases—or else whatsoever little

exhalation there might have been and which the aromatic spices used in the embalming process could not absorb, was carried off through the medium of the loopholes already mentioned. But in respect to the ravages of time, we may observe that on pausing to gaze upon the first form which had been stretched out there, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan beheld an empty helmet, the head having mouldered into dust, which the currents of air had blown away. The coat of mail and whatsoever portions of the attire were not formed of steel or iron, had rotted into blackness or had disappeared altogether. On the second slab some bleached bones might be discerned amongst the articles of panoply and of dress: but the two or three forms which were the latest in finding a resting-place there, were comparatively in a good state of preservation. We should observe that some of the helmets had visors which were closed, and the armour of these particular forms was a complete suit of steel panoply; so that naught within could be discerned. But the aventayles of others were raised—or else the casques themselves were visorless; and this being the case with the three last to which we have referred, their countenances were revealed. One was already blackened and disfigured with the effects of time: the next resembled shrivelled parchment; but the last was perfectly preserved in respect to its lineaments, and seemed like a face of wax of whitish sallowness, enframed by the warlike helmet. Against the walls leant the spears which had once been wielded by the hands of those perished ones that lay stretched upon their marble beds; and there were tatters of pennons still hanging to the points of the lances which had pertained to those whose dates of coffinless consignment to that place were the most recent.

Such was the spectacle which our young hero surveyed, and which in detail he inspected by the light of the torch that Redman carried in his hand. It threw forth a strong lurid glare; and the wax-like countenance of the last-mentioned scion of Roslin seemed to smile in its dead ghastliness as the ruddy glow was thrown upon it.

"Tell me, Redman," said Sir Fleming—"think you that there is any faith to be reposed in the legend which is cited to account for the strange fact the evidences of which we have before us?"

"There can be no doubt that the legend is strictly true, Sir Knight," answered the Lieutenant, in a voice of solemnity which seemed awe-felt and was in itself awe-inspiring. "My grandsire occupied at the time the post which I now hold; and often and often have I heard from his lips the tale whereof you speak."

Our hero retraced his steps to the first slab whereon lay the mouldering armour out of which the form it had once encased had vanished in fleeting dust.

"And it was here," he said, "that Lord Randolph of Roslin was laid!—the first whose remains rested coffinless above the ground!—and it was he whose crime entailed the penalties upon himself and upon the scions of his race for two generations!"

"Yes—it was here," said the Lieutenant. "The three slabs immediately following, form the resting-places of his three sons; and the four slabs which next ensue in due order, constituted the biers where his grandsons were laid out."

Fitz-Allan stood and gazed upon the first-mentioned slab and the mouldering objects which lay on it, while his mind revolved the details of the legend to which he had been alluding in his discourse with the Lieutenant. The tale was however brief and may be described in a few words. Lord

Randolph of Roslin (for the title of Caithness did not then exist) had wooed the Lady Blanche, the daughter of a neighbouring chieftain; she had however rejected his suit, and in this refusal was supported by her father and her six brothers—for her hand was promised to one whom she loved and who had gained the esteem of her relatives. The bridal of the youthful lovers was to be celebrated, when Lord Randolph, smarting with rage at his disappointment, and fired with passion for the charming and beautiful Blanche, was resolved by a desperate blow to gratify his vengeance and his love at the same time. At the head of his followers he stormed the neighbouring chieftain's castle; and there was a terrific fight, in which the father, the six brothers, and the affianced husband of the Lady Blanche were all ruthlessly slain. The hapless maiden was borne off by the savage conqueror to Roslin Castle, where a hurriedly performed ceremony made her his wife. But she never occupied the bridal couch; for within an hour after those forced nuptials she was found dead in her apartment to which she had retired. Some said that she had died of a broken heart—others that she had taken a subtle poison which by some means she had procured. She was interred in the vaults of Roslin: Lord Randolph appeared to mourn her loss for a time—and then he wooed and won another bride. But a gloom had fallen upon his mind—remorse had laid fast hold upon him—and in the prime of life he found his end prematurely approaching. It was rumoured by some persons at the time that the spirit of the Lady Blanche had appeared to him, and that from this apparition he had sustained a shock from which recovery was impossible. Other persons however, who were less prone to superstition than those who believed and propagated this report, averred that Lord Randolph was a prey to a wasting and incurable disease which he had long kept secret. Certain however it was that in his forty-second year he found his end approaching; and tortured by all the horrors of remorse, he had recourse to his father-confessor for consolation and absolution. He dreaded lest the curse of his own crimes should be visited upon his offspring and should cling to them; and he demanded what might be done to propitiate the spirits of those who had met their death through his stupendous iniquity? The priest, at a loss to answer the question, recommended that a holy hermit who dwelt in Roslin woods should be consulted. The anchorite was accordingly brought to the castle; and having bitterly reproached the dying Lord Randolph for his crimes, he addressed him in some such strain as the following:—

"Forasmuch as thou didst foully murder the father, the six brothers, and the affianced bridegroom of the Lady Blanche, thou and seven of thy scions shall not rest in hallowed graves! The curse shall not depart from the house of Roslin until thou and seven of thy descendants shall have paid the debt of nature and found resting-places above the soil. And this shall be done that a memorial of thy crimes as well as of the atonement made for them may ever exist within thine ancestral castle as a warning to thy posterity. Swear that it shall be so; and on this condition only mayst thou receive absolution!"

The dying Lord Randolph took the oath required of him; and he received absolution. By the most solemn injunctions he bound his sons to consent, for themselves and for their own sons (when such should be born unto them) that the stipulation should be fully carried out as the only means of averting a terrible curse from the Roslin family. And the injunctions were obeyed; and thus was it that eight scions of that race slept not in hallowed

graves, but were laid above the soil in the subterranean of the old castle,—eight members of that family thus paying absolutionary penalties for the foul murder of the eight relatives, including the bridegroom, of the unfortunate Lady Blanche!

Such was the legend the details of which Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan revolved in his mind as he stood contemplating the slab on which the remains of Lord Randolph had been deposited a century back. He had heard it whispered in his boyhood that the spirit of the Lady Blanche had been seen in the castle; and at that period of his life he had more or less believed in the superstitious rumour: but of late years, when he had thought of it, during his sojourn in France—but still more especially on this evening when he had made up his mind to visit the subterranean for an object which has yet to be explained—he had treated the rumour with the disregard that an enlightened intelligence generally bestows upon such stories. Now however, as he stood in that vault, entombed as it were in its stupendous silence—gazing upon the relics of the eight forms which lay stretched before him—with Redman standing motionless by his side, holding up the torch which threw out all those objects into fullest relief, but beyond the glare of which utter obscurity prevailed,—Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan felt a certain superstitious awe stealing over him, like something that was creeping with a colder and colder sensation upon his very form itself. He slowly turned his eyes upon the Lieutenant; and he was instantaneously struck by the aspect of this individual's countenance. It plainly and unmistakably denoted the same feeling, only that it was evidently experienced to a much stronger extent.

"Redman," said Fitz-Allan, in a low voice, "you tell me that your grandsire corroborated the truth of the legend in your hearing?"

"Often and often, Sir Knight!" replied the Lieutenant, whose voice struck our hero as having a gloomy and sepulchral sound.

"And what belief did that grandsire of yours entertain," proceeded Fleming, "in respect to Lord Randolph's death?"

The Lieutenant did not immediately answer: but he looked at Fitz-Allan with a sombre significance of countenance; and at length he said in a low deep tone, "My grandsire had every reason to believe that the spirit of the unfortunate Lady Blanche appeared to the destroyer of her happiness; for the old man assured me that he himself had more than once seen the same apparition."

"And you believe that your grandsire spoke truly?" asked Fitz-Allan, with the creeping sensation of superstitious awe coming still colder and colder over him.

"I know that my grandsire," answered Redman positively, "was incapable of deception. But I will tell you more, Sir Knight! My father himself—he too is gone, poor man, to his last account!—assured me that he had seen the same white beautiful shape—and this also I believe."

"But in this case, Redman," said our hero, struggling hard to reason himself out of the superstitious ideas and even apprehensions which he felt to be gaining upon him,—“in this case how happened it that you so willingly accompanied me to these vaults to-night?"

"Oh, Sir Fleming! that is easily explained," answered the Lieutenant. "In the first place, as I said just now up in your own chamber, I am only too anxious to render you a service; and when you asked me to suffer you, unknown to any one, to descend this night into the vaults, I cheerfully gave my assent. Besides, the Lady Blanche was virtuous as she was beautiful; and her spirit cannot be an

"evil one. If it make its appearance, it must be for some wise or good purpose, though perhaps it may not be understood at the time. Look you, Sir Fleming! I have no misdeeds upon my conscience—I have faithfully served the family whose bread I eat—I have wronged no man—and if I have shed blood it has been in fair fight where my own has likewise been spilt. I confess regularly to the priest—I tell my beads—I know my *aves* and *credos* by heart; and is it likely, therefore, that a spirit would come from the grave to do me an injury? Nevertheless, I frankly avow that if I fancied a midnight ramble, it would not be precisely to these vaults that I should by choice direct my steps. And you, Sir Fleming, can, I am sure, lay your hand upon your own heart and speak with equal certitude of the clearness of your own conscience?"

"The blessed Saints be thanked, this can I do!" said Fitz-Allan in a fervent tone.

"Amen!"—the word seemed to be faintly breathed, yet in a feminine voice of silvery clearness, throughout the subterranean: it floated as if it were an angel tone that had given utterance to it—soft, liquid, musical, and yet with a solemn fervour in it.

Redman started, and for a moment seemed as if he were about to drop the torch: but shifting it to his left hand, he made the sign of the cross with the right. Fitz-Allan remained motionless: he was riveted to the spot—and yet it was not actual terror that thus paralyzed him; it was a species of holy amazement, mingled with a beatific feeling such as one might experience when smitten with the conviction that the voice of some good angel had spoken cheerfully and encouragingly from the sphere of its own invisibility. There was a long pause: all remained in utter silence; and at length Fitz-Allan said in a low tremulous tone, "You heard something, Redman! What was it that you thus heard?"

"As I have a soul to be saved," replied the Lieutenant, "I heard a sweet voice murmur, Amen!"

Sir Fleming was now convinced that it was no delusion on his own part; and the incident had all in a moment banished from his mind his former scepticism in reference to the tale of the occasional appearance of the spirit of the Lady Blanche. Yet still he was not frightened; and his sensation was such that he could confidently say within himself, "If the vision should appear to me, I will assuredly question her and ask why she comes!"

"Let us proceed, Sir Fleming," faltered forth Redman,—"unless indeed you now wish to retrace your steps—which perhaps—"

"No!" answered the youth firmly; "I will proceed, good Redman; and all things considered, I would rather continue my way alone. Do you retire to the summit of the staircase where we have left the lamp—or into the oratorio——"

"And then," interrupted Redman bluntly, "you will think within yourself that the Lieutenant of Roslin Castle is a coward, and that in a dastard manner he abandoned you at a moment when his companionship was most needed!"

"By all the Saints, Redman—and by that spirit which may be hovering around us—as well as by the shades of the departed amidst whose memorials we now stand, I swear to you," cried the youth solemnly, "that I shall entertain no such thought,—for it is easy to separate the idea of the courage which one shows in the ranks of danger, from that mental power which is requisite for such moments as this. In a word, Redman, I would rather be alone."

"Tis well, Sir Fleming," rejoined the Lieutenant: "but I cannot thus leave you. What if you were to behold something, and you were to proclaim it

to-morrow to the Earl, to your sister, or your friends,—would it not then transpire that I, Redman the Lieutenant, dastardly abandoned you——"

"I swear, my worthy friend," interrupted the youth, "that the seal of silence shall remain upon my lips in respect to my visit to these vaults to-night. Whatever I may see or hear—and I assuredly anticipate the occurrence of nothing more to startle or amaze me—but if in this idea I be deceived, I tell you, Redman, that whatever I may see or hear shall be confined within my own breast. And now, my friend, leave me! Give me the torch—I will light you to the staircase—and you can await me in the oratorio."

"Since such is your will, Sir Fleming, it shall be obeyed," answered Redman.

It was however still with an air of reluctance and hesitation, as if the sturdy warrior was ashamed of himself for thus yielding to the youth's entreaty, that he surrendered up the torch, together with the pass-key for the gates of the iron barriers. Fleming lighted him as far as the ascent of stone steps; and he then slowly retraced his way through the compartment containing the monuments, into that where the coffinless forms were stretched. Here he lingered not; but unlocking the gate of the inner barrier, he passed into the third compartment. This, like the first-mentioned, contained tombs: but it was devoted to the sepulture of persons unconnected with the Roslin family and who might happen to die in the Castle. At the extremity were the great doors which constituted the main entrance into the subterranean, and the keys of which, as already stated, were kept by the steward Hepburn. It must not, however, from these remarks be inferred that every death which took place in the Castle was followed by an interment in the vaults of the edifice. This honour was only reserved for friends of the family or for individuals of distinction whom death might happen to overtake during a sojourn at the fortalice. For the inferior persons of the household there was a cemetery, with a chapel attached to it, on the slope of an adjacent hill beyond the glen.

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan opened the gate of the last barrier, and entered the third compartment of the subterranean. It was there that his father was buried. When a boy he had knelt by the tomb: but now that he was touching upon manhood, and after a seven years' absence from Scotland, he deemed it a pious duty to revisit that sacred spot. As the reader is aware, it was only very recently that the youth had learnt who his father really was; and this was another reason why he came to weep and to pray over the remains of that parent who had experienced such sorrows and misfortunes. The youth was deeply imbued with a sense of religion—and indeed most persons were in the age of which we are writing, when sceptical propagandism was almost utterly unknown: and in addition to the motives at which we have already glanced, Fitz-Allan had sought this as the first convenient opportunity of offering up his prayers to heaven for his safe deliverance from the combat's danger and for the triumph he had experienced in the morning. Where could he better do this than by the tomb of his deceased father?—that tomb to which his own filial piety, apart from all other causes would have led his steps on his return after a long absence from his native Scotland!

That softly-whispered word "Amen" seemed to be still vibrating like a gentle zephyr-breath in his ear, as he approached the stone monument which the friendly kindness of the Earl of Caithness had caused to be placed over his father's remains. The youth fixed the torch in one of the openings of the iron barrier, so that his hands might be free to

clasp in the fervour of devotion; and he knelt down by the side of the tomb. All was silent in reality: it was a stupendous silence too, which reigned in that subterranean,—though to the young Knight's fancy the angel voice, as he had deemed it to be, was still whispering the sanctifying word in his ear. He commenced his prayer: it was in silence that he prayed—it was not with the lips audibly, but with the heart inwardly. Thus several minutes elapsed,—when it suddenly struck him that he heard the sound of a footstep somewhere behind, apparently in the middle compartment, which was that where the eight forms rested on their marble slabs. The youth listened—but all was still: he thought that it must have been his fancy, and he resumed his prayer. Two or three more minutes elapsed; and then all in an instant the torch fell from the place where he had placed it. It was immediately extinguished; and utter darkness succeeded.

Fitz-Allan sprang up to his feet; and now it was a real superstitious terror—an awful dread that seized upon him; for the idea smote him that it was scarcely possible for the occurrence to be accidental: he knew that he had so well fixed the handle of the torch in the iron-work it could not have fallen unless by some agency, either human or preternatural. And situated as he then was—in that subterranean place of tombs—with the unburied dead in close vicinage—with the conviction likewise that he had already received a sign of some supernatural presence—it is not to be wondered at if Fitz-Allan, heroic and strong-minded though he were, should have been seized with a mortal dread.

He had started up to his feet, as we have already stated: but he was transfixed to the spot, and his very breathing was suspended with terror. Just as he was beginning to recover himself—just as he was inwardly saying, "It was an accident!"—and just as he was experiencing a sense of shame at the fright to which he had yielded, a new cause of wonderment and excitement began to develop itself. A glimmering appeared at the farther extremity of the compartment where he was: it seemed to be in the immediate neighbourhood of the principal doors. At first it was only a faint feeble glimmer: but it gradually expanded—and as it thus grew brighter, it revealed the snowy-white dress of a female form that seemed to be emerging unaccountably from the depths of the darkness, as the light itself was doing. Fitz-Allan looked on with that species of bewildering wonderment which rivets the feet to the ground and which concentrates the attention upon the object, leaving the individual in uncertainty whether it be a reality or a dream. Gradually as the figure developed itself, it took the shape of a lady clothed in white, and with a white veil thrown over her head—the folds of this veil being so thick as to neutralise the transparency of the texture and to prevent the countenance from being seen through. Fitz-Allan's terror yielded by degrees to that species of solemn rapture which had possessed him when the word "Amen" had whisperingly and vibrantly reached his ear; and remembering the resolve which he had made but a short time back, he said, "I adjure thee, whosoever thou art, to speak! Why appearest thou before me?"

The form—whatever it were, whether of this world or of another—made a motion with its hand as if to command the youth to remain where he was: and then in a low soft musical voice—the same voice which had ere now breathed the sanctifying word—she proceeded to half-chant, half-recite the following lines:—

"Knight of St. Michael's cross of gold,
Knight of St. Andrew's Order bold,
Beneath whose spear in tourney rolled
The Paladin of France!—
Hero, without ancestral name!
Despite a heritage of shame,
Dost thou create thine own fair fame
With falchion and with lance!"

"Young warrior! who in grand career
So bravely bore the quivering spear,
And met with heart that knew not fear
The Douglas in his rage!
Be thou the Chief on Liddel's side,
Of Teviot's chivalry the pride,
Ranger of Eskdale's forests wide,
And Lord of Hermitage!"

"Assert thy right and brook not wrong,
Be ever in thy purpose strong,
And swerve not as thou speed'st along
In this career of thine:—

Then brighter yet, O youth! shall be
The day-star of thy destiny!
And Roslin's virgin-rose for thee
Shall with thy laurels twine!"

With breathless attention our young hero listened; not a single syllable did he lose;—and indeed it was scarcely possible to do so, for the voice, though low, was of silvery clearness. Each line as it was given forth with a flow of most exquisite melody, became imprinted on his mind and impressed on his recollection, as if he had known them all before and had learnt them by heart. When the poem—whether adjuring or prophetic, or both, the bewildered and raptured youth scarcely knew how at the moment to decide—was finished, there was a pause; and then, as he was about to address some question to the form before him, and from which he was about twenty paces distant, another singular scene took place. For one leaf of the folding-doors opened—a light shining without, commingled itself with the mysterious one that was shining within—and a tall form, which at once struck Fitz-Allan to be that of Sir Casimir D'Este, appeared upon the threshold. What followed was the work of an instant. The white-clad lady approached Sir Casimir—laid her hand upon his arm—or at least appeared to do so; and then the entire scene vanished from our hero's view. The light disappeared—and utter darkness again prevailed in the subterranean.

In the midst of that darkness stood Sir Fleming, bewildered and astounded, but not afraid. That he had seen a vision—that the Lady Blanche had appeared to him—he entertained not the slightest doubt. The lines she had recited were indelibly imprinted on his memory; and it seemed as if he could embrace their full meaning at a glance. Wealth, honours, and the hand of Albertina were promised him as the reward of a constant and persevering pursuance of the career on which he had entered. All this was intelligent enough: but what meant the sudden appearance of that other form?—was it really the Teutonic Knight? or was it a spectral shape? If the latter, what was the significance of its appearance?—but if it were really Sir Casimir D'Este, why did he speak not? what had the white-clad lady to do with him? and why did he disappear at the same time? Fitz-Allan was bewildered; and when all these rapid reflections had swept through his mind, he again sank down by the side of his father's tomb; and in the utter darkness he again prayed fervently.

All continued still—no new vision appeared to him; and he rose to depart. Happening to kick his foot against the extinguished torch, he picked it up, and groped his way to the gate of the nearest barrier. This he closed and locked: but it was now with a still greater degree of carefulness that he had to make his pathway amidst the marble resting-places of the eight defunct scions of the lordly house of Roslin. He however succeeded;—and we

should observe that there was no longer the slightest terror in his mind. Superstitious awe there was, commingled with a beatific rapture on account of what he had seen, and a thrilling hopefulness in consequence of what he had heard. He closed the gate of the other barrier; and now he was guided by the glimmering light of the lamp which stood on the summit of the ascent of stone steps. The door at the top stood open; and on reaching the oratorio, Sir Fleming found the Lieutenant kneeling in front of one of the altars.

"Ah! you have come at last?" said Redman, rising up as the young Knight approached him. "May I hope that all has passed well?"

"Yes—all has passed well," responded our hero. "Come, my worthy friend! let us go hence and separate to our respective chambers; for I am afraid that I have already kept you too long from your couch."

"Make no apologies, Sir Fleming," rejoined the Lieutenant; "and believe me that I am at all times delighted to serve you."

The youth expressed his gratitude for this assurance: they quitted the oratorio together; and having bidden each other "Good night," they sought each his own apartment.—Fitz-Allan to ponder all the wondrous things that within the last hour had occurred.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROGRESS OF LOVE.

So solemnly had Fleming Fitz-Allan sworn to the Lieutenant Redman that he would keep secret their visit to the subterranean, that he felt he could not in honour and truthfulness make an exception even in favour of his sister. But there was one point which he was most anxious to ascertain;—and this was to clear up the mystery that appeared to attach itself to the appearance of the form of Sir Casimir D'Este in the vault at the moment when the last tones of the voice of silver melody were still softly vibrating in his ear. On that point the youth knew not what to think. The impression was strong in his mind that he had seen one leaf of the folding-doors open and that the Knight had entered as any other human being might have done; whereas the apparition of the white-clad lady had revealed itself in altogether a different manner. Sir Fleming naturally argued within himself that if the form which he had mistaken for that of the Teutonic Knight was veritably a phantom-shape of the same aerial nature as he believed the white-clad lady to have been, that form would not have needed the human process of opening a door, but would have emerged from the midst of the thin air itself. Yet, on the other hand, if it were indeed Sir Casimir—and if he had burst suddenly and unconsciously upon the wild and wondrous scene that was taking place—how was it that no ejaculation of surprise had issued from his lips on beholding that radiant spectacle? Still it was quite probable that Sir Casimir's lips might have been sealed by amazement, if not by consternation; or a preternatural spell might have been placed upon them. There was yet another hypothesis which suggested itself to the youth's mind. A vision from the other world might be only apparent to the view of the special individual for whom it was intended; and thus the Teutonic Knight, if he it really were in substantial flesh and blood, might after all have seen naught of the radiant spectacle: the ethereal figure might have approached him without his

having the slightest suspicion of her presence—and when her hand was laid upon his arm, the touch might have been by him unfelt. If he had brought a light with him, as Fleming believed must have been the case, its sudden extinction by a current of wind at the very moment when the preternatural halo itself vanished, would sufficiently account for the abrupt supervening of total darkness.

As a matter of course the intelligent mind of Fleming Fitz-Allan endeavoured to account by natural means for as much as possible of the night's wondrous spectacle; but that some portion of it must be looked upon as preternatural, he had no doubt. The vision was one thing—the appearance of the form which he had believed to be that of Sir Casimir, might be altogether another: the former occurrence admitted of no farther inquiry or investigation—but it was different with the latter, and he resolved that he would lose no time in the morning in satisfying himself upon this second point.

He lay upon his couch revolving all these things in his mind, and repeating over and over again the verses which had floated so melodiously upon his ear. The signification of the various salient points of the mystical rhythm was unmistakable; and line by line did he scan the poem with all the solemn fervour of one who felt that the accomplishment of a particular destiny depended entirely on himself. He was a Knight of the French Order of St. Michael, and in the lists the King had bidden him consider himself a member of St. Andrew's Order likewise. At the tournament at Versailles Sir Gilles De Vericourt, one of the noblest paladins of France, had been unhorsed and vanquished by his spear. A hero the world already considered him, while the name of Fitz-Allan which he bore was not his own, and his ancestral name was lost to him, perhaps for ever. Thus circumstanced, and in consequence of the decrees of the Black Parliament fulminated against his family, his was indeed a heritage of shame: but was he not creating for himself a renown entirely his own, by his good sword and his lance? He had conquered the Douglas in fair fight; and the estates of the deceased Sir William Douglas on the banks of the rivers Liddel and Hermitage, in Teviotdale, and in Eskdale, were apparently within his grasp. Was he, in obedience to the injunctive words of the vision, to stretch out his hand, despite all considerations, and take possession of the deceased warrior's bequeathments?—did it not seem as if the crowning hopes of his destiny depended upon thus acting? If he asserted his right and claimed those estates, and if he brooked not the wrong which would dispossess him—if he proved strenuous in his purpose thus to aggrandise himself,—then, and then only, might he aspire to the hand of Albertina!—then, and then only, in the figurative language of the poem, would the virgin rose of Roslin be twined with the laurels gained by his own heroism!

These were the readings of the prophetic lines; and while in one sense they inspired the rapture of hope, yet in another sense they bewildered the youth's mind as to the mode in which it was all to be accomplished. At length he said to himself, "It is vain and useless for me to perplex myself with conjectures! If it be heaven's purpose to smile upon me, the same supernal power which thus sent the vision for my encouragement, will by its own inscrutable means develop the circumstances requisite for the realization of everything. It therefore remains for me to seize upon those circumstances—to be daunted by no dangers—but amidst all perplexities to keep the one point steadily in view, at



No. 8.—MARGARET.

the same time resolutely pursuing my pathway towards it!"

Sleep stole upon Sir Fleming's eyes in the midst of his reflections; and it was a balmy slumber in which he became wrapped. When he awoke in the morning, he experienced a lightness of heart, an elasticity of mind, a strength of purpose, and a confidence in himself which produced influences acting as it were upon his physical nature. His countenance was animated—there was a manly decision in his look; and without conceit, vanity, or pride, his whole bearing seemed to have experienced a transition from the fiery reckless impetuosity of youth to the more sedate and calm determination of manhood. Morally, he was likewise changed—or rather, we should say, improved. He felt that in a few hours he had grown wiser as if by the experiences of several years; and there was something within him which seemed to make him aware that the recklessness of youthful impulses had given place to a more manly sagacity.

Having accomplished his toilet, Sir Fleming descended from his apartment; and in the passage leading to the room where the morning meal was to be served up, he found Sir Casimir D'Este contemplating with a warrior's admiration an admirably wrought suit of armour which stood upon a pedestal. Warm were the greetings betwixt the elder Knight and the younger one; and after the interchange of the usual morning compliments, Fleming said, "Then it appears that you slept well, Sir Casimir, and that you enjoyed an unbroken slumber?"

"Yes, my young friend," responded the Teutonic Knight: "from the instant that my head touched the pillow until an hour ago, did sleep seal mine eyes. It is my habit to slumber well and soundly when opportunity serves: for who can tell in this troubled world how soon stirring adventures may transpire to produce nights of activity instead of slumber?"

"True, Sir Casimir," said Fitz-Allan, who had been gazing steadily upon the Teutonic Knight's countenance, which continued perfectly calm. "Yet methought that I heard some one stirring just before midnight in the neighbourhood of your chamber—"

"Indeed?" said the Knight carelessly. "It assuredly was not myself whom you heard; for long before midnight sleep had overtaken me—and as I have already told you, it was interrupted not."

Sir Fleming was now convinced that it was not Sir Casimir D'Este, in the actual flesh and blood, whom he had seen in the subterranean, and that therefore the apparition of that form must have been as much a vision as that of the white-clad lady herself. Yet the impression was strong on his mind that the form wore the similitude of the Teutonic Knight; and therefore he was smitten with the idea that the destiny of this warrior was in some mysterious and inscrutable manner connected with his own. How this might be he could not conceive: but he felt that preternatural circumstances were interweaving themselves with his own fortunes—he resolved to abstain from bewildering himself with conjectures—but to abandon as it were the bark of his career to the unseen tide which was floating it onward and to the invisible winds which were fanning its sails.

After breakfast he found himself for a few minutes alone with his sister Margaret.

"Our conversation, my dear brother," she said, "was yesterday evening interrupted by the sudden return of the Earl and Albertina to the drawing-room. Doubtless you have since reflected on all that had passed between us?"

"I have reflected, Margaret,—profoundly reflected!" answered the young Knight. "I see that there is a crisis in one's fortunes which, according to the decision that is taken, may influence the whole of one's after-career!"

"True, my dear brother!—true!" said Margaret energetically. "And what is your decision?—for you are now experiencing such a crisis as that whereof you speak?"

"If it be possible, Margaret—if circumstances can by any probability so combine themselves, that in honour to myself, in safety for you, and without hazard to the security of our noble benefactor who has been to us as a father—if in such a way, my dear sister, I may claim and take possession of the broad lands and the proud castle bequeathed to me by the Knight of Liddesdale, I assuredly shall not reject the recompense which the deceased warrior intended me to earn as the champion of his cause."

It was with the light of a firm decision in the large clear dark eyes, and with a kindred glow upon the handsome countenance, that the young Fitz-Allan thus spoke. Margaret gazed upon him with an enthusiastic admiration: her nobly handsome form literally quivered with delight, and her voice vibrated with joy, as she threw her arms about his neck, exclaiming, "Well done, my brave and gallant brother! Now thou art worthy of thyself!—worthy of the lofty renown which you have already won! But tell me—how do you mean to proceed?"

"We will first await the promised communications from Melrose," responded the youth. "If they be suggestive of some course favourable to my views, we may trust to the Abbot's wisdom and we will adopt them. If otherwise, it will then be needful that we hold fresh counsel with the Earl of Caithness, and my proceedings shall be regulated accordingly."

A little more conversation passed between the brother and sister; and then their discourse was interrupted by the entrance of the Teutonic Knight, who came to bid them a temporary farewell—for he was about to leave Roslin Castle and proceed to Edinburgh. He however intimated that his sojourn in the capital would not be protracted to any lengthy period, and that when the business that took him thither should be completed, it was his intention of again availing himself of the hospitalities of Roslin. It was with the utmost kindness that he took his leave of the brother and sister, who little suspected that it was their own uncle that thus displayed so much affectionate interest on their behalf. They descended into the court-yard to witness the Knight's departure: the Earls of Caithness and Bassentyne, as well as the Lady Albertina, were already there; and Sir Casimir D'Este bade them all farewell with the assurance that he should esteem the interval a long one until he could rejoin them within the same hospitable walls.

Upwards of a fortnight now passed away; and in the meanwhile a second communication was received from the Abbot of Melrose, desiring that patience might still be exercised in reference to the subject of his former letter, as certain delays had arisen which prevented the holy father from entering into particulars so speedily as he had at first hoped and intended. Sir Fleming was constrained by prudence to submit to this procrastination; and Margaret uttered not a syllable indicative of impatience.

But during this lapse of something more than a fortnight, the young Earl of Bassentyne had more than once been led to look into the depths of his own heart, and question himself relative to the true nature of the feelings which had found a place there.

He could not disguise from himself that while he entertained a brotherly interest on behalf of Albertina, yet that it was Margaret who had inspired him with a sentiment of love. Be it borne in mind that this was no acquaintance simply of the three weeks which had dated since the young Earl's arrival at the castle; but in his boyhood he had known them and he had been their frequent playmate. Looking back to those times, he recalled a thousand little incidents which proved to him that even *then* he had given the preference to Margaret; and *now* he found that this preference was perpetuated and that it had expanded into love. When he thus comprehended the channel in which his affections were flowing, he resolved, as an honourable young man, to act with that promptitude and decision which circumstances seemed to demand: he could no longer allow the Earl of Caithness to suppose that he was the willing suitor for the hand of Albertina. It had moreover struck him that Albertina and Fleming secretly loved each other, and he was rejoiced at the idea, as if it should prove to be the case, he felt that it would materially alleviate the difficulties of his own position. Were it not for the sort of engagement which subsisted between himself and the Earl of Caithness that he should espouse the Lady Albertina, he would not have precipitated matters nor have sought an opportunity of declaring himself to Margaret: he would have paid his addresses to the latter for a longer period, and would have extended his suit to an interval that was more becoming and proper ere he declared it. But he felt that in existing circumstances explanations could not be too speedily entered upon.

But in the meanwhile he had not openly shown any marked preference for Margaret Fitz-Allan. He had continued so to divide his attentions between the two ladies, that they assumed the aspect of the proper courtesies bestowed by a guest, with nothing pointed nor conspicuous in them. Yet with the instinct of a loving heart, he felt convinced that he was not an object of indifference to Margaret. Occasionally, on bending a furtive look upon her, he had unexpectedly encountered her gaze; and there was a tell-tale significance in the manner in which her dark eyes were instantaneously cast down and in the blush which mantled upon her cheeks. When he took her hand on greeting her in the morning or on bidding her "good night" when the hour for retiring came—or when he assisted her to mount her palfrey for riding or hawking excursions—he felt that hand tremble in his own, and a secret sympathy made him aware that the thrill which the contact sent to his own heart was reciprocally felt. In a word, the thousand little indications of love which are perceptible to those who thus love, but which pass unnoticed by others who are present, had inspired Roland with the hope and the belief that his suit would not be unacceptable to the superb and handsome Margaret.

The Earl of Caithness entertained not the slightest suspicion of the different channels in which flowed the affections of the young people. That the Earl of Bassentyne paid no marked attentions to Albertina scarcely struck him, and assuredly did not trouble him; for if he thought of it at all, he attributed it to diffidence on Roland's part, or else on the other hand to a manly abstention from what might seem to be the sentimentality of a boy-lover. Indeed, that the Earl of Caithness should entertain this latter notion, was perhaps the more natural, inasmuch as Roland was five-and-twenty years of age, and had therefore arrived at years of complete discretion—that period of life when a manly sedateness begins to subdue the impetuosity of youth. While thus speaking of Roland, we may remind the reader that

he has already been hastily glanced at as a fine, tall, handsome, dark-haired young man. We may now add that he had well-formed features, an intelligent countenance, and a noble frankness in his looks. Contrary to the usual custom of the age, he wore no beard: but a moustache relieved his face from an air of youthfulness and of effeminacy. His manners were polished: his bearing, without affectation, was that of a courtly noble. In a word, possessed of a handsome person, a proud title, vast riches, and immense estates, he was in every way calculated to win the regards of such a mind as Margaret's, which was impassioned in its feelings and which cherished the loftiest ambition.

Returning to the immediate thread of our narrative, we must proceed to state that the Earl of Bassentyne, in pursuance of the considerations already specified, determined to seek an opportunity of declaring his love to Margaret Fitz-Allan. When once a lover thus makes up his mind, the opportunity which is sought fails not to present itself speedily. So it was in the present instance. The Earl of Caithness was one forenoon occupied in directing some repairs to be made to the bridge across the glen—Fleming and Albertina were walking together in the pleasure-grounds attached to the Castle—but Margaret had remained in the usual sitting-apartment. Was it that she herself felt anxious to bring matters to a crisis with Roland of Bassentyne?—was it that she, with the instinct of woman, penetrated his desire to obtain an opportunity of declaring his passion? And was she now seeking to furnish it? It might be so: for she was calculating and astute, worldly-minded and selfish, although her true disposition was concealed beneath the elegancies of manner, the graces of bearing, and the general art of dissimulation which with her was natural.

The young Earl, having first sought Margaret in the pleasure-grounds, and on hearing from her brother Fleming that she was indoors, hastened with beating heart to the room where he hoped to find her;—and there she was, apparently occupied with some embroidery, and looking as if she little anticipated any interruption at the moment. But when the door opened and Roland entered the room, the warm blood mantled to her cheeks—her dark eyes, after flashing their light upon him, were instantaneously bent down; and never in his estimation had she seemed more handsome or more worthy of becoming his Countess than at that instant!

CHAPTER XVII.

ROLAND AND MARGARET.

IF Margaret Fitz-Allan on the present occasion appeared handsomer than ever in the eyes of the Earl of Bassentyne, he himself shone not less advantageously to the view of the damsel. The heightened colour was likewise upon his own cheeks; and his fine expressive eyes sparkled with hope as he accosted her. There was no boyish timidity in his manner; but there was a manly dignity and confidence in his demeanour, mingled with a courtly elegance, which well became the high born and opulent Scottish peer. Margaret, quickly recovering her self-possession, saw the necessity of assuming an aspect as if she were utterly unsuspicious of the motive for which he now sought her; and she said in a gay lively tone, "What, my lord! have you no occupation for this fi rennoon? Is your steed left pawing the ground impatiently in his stable? and is there

no diversion for which the Earl of Caithness or my brother would rejoice in your companionship?"

"Beautiful Margaret," replied the young nobleman, with a look of tender significance, "how could I better employ myself than by seeking your presence and soliciting the pleasure of an hour's confidential discourse with you?"

"Oh, truly, my lord!" she exclaimed, with an air of the frankest gaiety, "if you desire to study how birds and flowers may be embroidered on this satin, I shall cheerfully give you a lesson:"—and she smiled so as to display the brilliancy of her faultless teeth.

"Full well, Margaret, do I appreciate all your accomplishments," rejoined the Earl; "and no one understands or admires them more than myself. But let the embroidery rest there for the present: I would fain press the fair hand which otherwise might be bestowing its skill upon the satin."

Thus speaking he took the damsel's hand and carried it to his lips. Margaret rose from her seat, for her heart was now fluttering violently with the rapturous emotions that were excited within her by this fulfilment of the hope which she had entertained; for she saw that Roland was about to seek her as his bride.

"May I claim this fair hand?" he asked, in a low gentle voice, at the same time bending upon her a look of ineffable tenderness: "may I entertain the hope that the Earl of Bassentyne is not altogether an object of indifference to the beautiful Margaret Fitz-Allan, and that she will consent to share his titles and his fortunes? Would that the first were loftier and that the last were ampler; for were I a crowned King, it would rejoice me to lay my diadem at your feet!"

"My lord," said Margaret, in a tremulous tone, as she gently withdrew her hand, "methought that your heart was devoted to her whom I love as a sister—the Lady Albertina!"

"The Lady Albertina," replied the Earl, "is at this moment in the company of him whom she loves, and whose heart I believe is equally devoted to her. You, Margaret, who must be in your brother's confidence——"

"Yes, my lord," she softly interrupted him: "it were a pitiful affectation on my own part, as well as an act of untruthfulness, to pretend ignorance of the love which my brother cherishes for the daughter of the Earl of Caithness. But the Earl himself——"

"Must be dealt frankly with!" exclaimed Roland: "his lordship must be disabused of the ideas which he has entertained in reference to myself! Albertina possesses not my heart: and even if it were otherwise, she has not a heart to bestow upon me. It is you, Margaret, whom I love—you whose hand I seek—you only whom I will lead to the altar! The Earl of Caithness is just and generous—he is a kind father and a magnanimous friend—he seeks only the happiness of those in whom he is interested. Believe me, dearest Margaret, if from your lips I receive the assent which will infuse bliss into my soul, all will progress favourably and well! We are not strangers to each other—ours is not an acquaintance of yesterday: in our younger years were we friends and playmates: and now I feel—Oh! believe me I feel that even *then* the sentiment of love was germinating in my heart! Say, then, Margaret—think you that as Countess of Bassentyne you can be happy?"

The damsel bent upon the young Earl a look that was eloquently expressive of an affirmative; and of her own accord she gave him her hand. Again he pressed it to his lips—but this time with even a more fervid rapture than before, as he exclaimed,

"Hear me, beloved Margaret, while I pledge my faith and honour, as a nobleman and a knight, that henceforth thine happiness shall be mine only study—that thee only will I wed—and that whatsoever may betide, thine image only shall occupy my heart! Speak to me, dearest Margaret, in a similar strain!—give me the betrothing pledge which may inspire me with fullest confidence and enable me to look upon thee as mine own!"

"Roland," replied the damsel, now for the first time addressing him by his Christian name since the days when they were playmates together, "with equal truth and sincerity do I pledge myself unto thee! Thee only will I wed—and thine image only shall occupy my heart!"

An exclamation of joy burst from the lips of the Earl of Bassentyne; and drawing a ring from his finger, he placed it on the hand of Margaret. From one of her own taper fingers she likewise drew a ring, which she proffered to Roland; and these pledges being exchanged, their betrothal was complete. Then he strained her to his breast, and imprinted kisses upon her moist lips and upon her blushing cheeks.

The lovers remained in conversation together,—indulging in that discourse which is so sweet when following upon a mutual avowal of affection, and when the future is tinted with that roseate hue over which no cloud of mistrust or uncertainty flings its shade. But suddenly they were startled by an unusual bustle in the castle—persons hurrying to and fro in the court-yard and speaking in loud and excited tones. They instantly became aware that something must have occurred; and they were about to issue from the room to ascertain what it might be, when the door was thrown open, and Hepburn the steward rushed in with dismay and consternation upon his countenance.

"What is it, Hepburn?" demanded both Roland and Margaret, as if speaking in the same breath.

"The Earl—my master—my much-loved lord——" and the steward gasped for further utterance.

"Speak, speak, Hepburn!" exclaimed Margaret: "what has happened to his lordship? The blessed Saints grant that no accident——"

At this moment the voice of Fleming Fitz-Allan was heard shouting in the court-yard, "To horse! to horse! Where is the Earl of Bassentyne?"

"Here!" cried the nobleman, throwing open the casement which looked upon that court-yard. "I come, my friend, for whatsoever service my presence may be needed! What is it, Hepburn? Speak quick!"

"The Earl, my lord," replied the steward, "has been seized upon and carried off by the followers of the Douglas!"

"Oh, this is indeed terrible!" exclaimed Margaret. "Away, Roland!—away to the rescue!"

A moment's pressure of her hand, and the Earl of Bassentyne was the next instant rushing down the staircase to join those who were mustering in the court-yard. In the vestibule he met three or four female domestics who were bearing the inanimate form of Albertina: but he tarried not a moment—for his services would be in this case unavailing, and they were moreover needed elsewhere. Albertina was borne in a deep swoon to her chamber, where Margaret was immediately in readiness to minister unto her; and while adopting the requisite measures to bring her back to consciousness, she learnt from the attendant damsels sufficient to make her aware of what had happened.

As we have already stated, the Earl of Caithness was occupied that forenoon in superintending certain repairs that were being made to the stone bridge across the glen to the entrance of the castle. There

were some dozen workmen engaged in the task ; and during an interval when his supervision was not immediately required, the Earl rambled to a little distance on the side of the glen facing the rock on which the fortalice stood. All of a sudden between twenty and thirty of the Borderers, armed to the teeth and mounted on horseback, rushed forth from the thick wood in which they had been concealed, and surrounded the Earl. His sword flashed from its sheath—but he was instantaneously overpowered, bound, and placed upon a horse that had hitherto been led, and which was no doubt provided for some such purpose as that we are describing. The men who were at work upon the bridge, rushed forward, armed with their mattocks and spades, to the succour of their master: but it was too late. They were on foot—the Borderers were mounted ; and urging their steeds to a gallop, they disappeared with their prisoner along the winding road which ascended amidst the dense woods on the acclivity of the glen. For an instant the party appeared upon the summit, and then they again vanished from the view as they sped down the slope leading to the plain. The tidings of the outrage had been quickly conveyed to the castle : Fleming Fitz-Allan and Albertina, returning from their walk in the pleasure-grounds, were at the moment traversing the courtyard ; and the effect produced upon the lovely damsel had been already seen. Fleming consigned her to the care of her maidens, and at once gave orders for the male dependants of the establishment to muster for the purpose of pursuit.

The horses were soon brought forth—the lieutenant Redman displayed his accustomed activity in marshalling a number of the Earl's retainers—those of Lord Bassentyne were equally prompt in making their preparations—and in a very few minutes a party of some sixty men, headed by Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, Roland, and the lieutenant Redman, galloped across the stone bridge and thundered up the ascent on the opposite side of the glen.

When Albertina returned to consciousness, it was only to awaken from the happiness of oblivion to plunge into the wildest paroxysms of grief. She threw herself into the arms of Margaret, upon whose bosom she wept copiously ; and then she gave way to the most passionate lamentations. Margaret, though of a selfish disposition, was however far from being so callous as to remain unaffected by the dire calamity which had occurred : she loved the Earl as a benefactor, and she deeply loved Albertina. She was smitten with affliction for the outrage committed against the former : she said all she could to soothe and console the latter.

"Alas, my poor father !" murmured Albertina, in a broken voice ; "what dreadful fate is in store for thee ? I tremble—Oh ! I tremble !—for thou hast drawn down upon thine head the vengeance of the Black Douglas !—and the vengeance of a Douglas is terrible !"

"Let us hope, dearest Albertina," said Margaret, "that the pursuing party will overtake the Borderers. From the intelligence which has reached us, it is certain that the party of our friends is more numerous than the lawless horde of the Douglas : and thus if there should be a fight, the result is beyond all doubt ! Console yourself therefore, my beloved Albertina !"

"Oh, Margaret !" murmured the sobbing and weeping girl, "my heart is filled with the sorest misgivings ; for, I repeat, the vengeance of a Douglas is terrible ! Have we not heard how the Knight of Liddesdale starved to death in his Castle of Hermitage the brave Sir Alexander Ramsay years ago ?—and did not that Knight himself perish the other day from the assassin-blows dealt him by his kins-

man the Earl ? Oh, Margaret ! I shudder—I shudder when I think of all these things !"—and the afflicted young lady trembled as if under the influence of an ice-chill.

Margaret likewise shuddered ; for she knew full well that Albertina's apprehensions were far from being unfounded. The idea of vengeance was ever a terrible association with the name of Douglas : no scion of that family was ever known to forgive an injury or to neglect the means of chastising an offender. The Earl of Caithness had become the trustee and executor on behalf of the deceased Knight of Liddesdale ; and this circumstance, even if there were no other considerations, was regarded by the two young ladies as quite sufficient to render him an object of hatred on the part of the unscrupulous Earl of Douglas. It was no wonder, therefore, if Albertina were so passionately afflicted by the calamity which had overtaken her father—or if Margaret Fitz-Allan were compelled to admit within herself that the case was most grave and serious, and that the life of the Earl of Caithness perhaps depended upon the success of the pursuing party that had gone forth to his succour.

The gentlest dispositions are often those which in certain circumstances give way to the wildest paroxysms of grief ;—and so it was now with Albertina Roslin. Margaret, who was stronger-minded, was the first to recover a sufficient degree of self-possession for the purpose of serious deliberation ; and she thought within herself that she ought not to remain idle there in so grave an emergency. The Borderers might outstrip the pursuing party—which was indeed most seriously to be apprehended, considering the start which the former had of the latter. The latter might moreover find themselves at default by losing the track taken by the others ; and thus the Earl of Caithness might become the inmate of a dungeon before his friends could even ascertain to which of the several strongholds possessed by the Black Douglas the unfortunate nobleman had been consigned as a captive. Therefore Margaret was unwilling to leave the Earl's safety to a single chance—namely, success on the part of the pursuers. She thought that something else should be done, so that measures might be set on foot to meet any emergency ; and with the natural vigour of her mind she speedily resolved upon the adoption of a particular course.

"Compose yourself, dearest Albertina," she said ; "for tears and lamentations will avail nothing ; but we should look about us and see whether there be not duties which we have now to perform."

"Yes, Margaret—you speak well and wisely," said Albertina, hastily wiping her eyes. "What can we do ?—Oh, tell me what we can do on behalf of him whom we both so much love !"

"The King of Scotland," replied Margaret emphatically, "has recently been the guest of the Earl of Caithness within these walls ; and at parting he pledged his royal friendship to your noble father. But even apart from that vow which he thus made, he is bound to vindicate the majesty of the law, protect those who are outraged, and punish the outrager. I will at once repair to Edinburgh—I will seek the King—I will throw myself upon my knees before him—and I will alike demand and implore his immediate interference in this case ! No time is to be lost—and we must not trust to the chapter of accidents to ensure your father's safety !"

"Margaret," said Albertina, with a degree of composure which surprised her friend, and with an amount of dignity which she seldom displayed, "accept my sincerest thanks for your wise suggestion and sisterly proffer : but I will go to Edinburgh !

It is for me to plead my father's cause in the presence of our King!"

"No, Albertina," rejoined Margaret; "the proper place for the heiress of Roslin is Roslin Castle itself! The deadly feud is but too evidently proclaimed by the Black Douglas against the house of Caithness; and who can tell but that a beleaguering force of the fierce Borderers may assemble around Roslin? In the absence of their lord and master, the retainers on the Roslin domain will look to that chief's daughter for countenance and encouragement. I see, Albertina, that you are now equal to the present emergency. Issue your mandates that Hepburn may assemble those who owe feudal service to their lord, your noble father; and suffer me to repair without delay to the capital and lay everything before the King."

"Be it as you say, dearest Margaret," replied Albertina. "Go!—and may heaven speed your errand! Rest assured that in your absence I shall fulfil my duty as a chieftain's daughter."

Margaret hastened to her own chamber, where she speedily assumed her travelling attire and made preparations for the journey which she was about to undertake to Edinburgh. In the meanwhile her palfrey was caparisoned; and horses were likewise gotten in readiness for the female dependant whom she purposed to take with her, and four armed retainers who were to accompany her as an escort. She bade farewell to Albertina and set out upon her expedition. Thus, in less than two hours after the pursuing party had crossed the stone bridge, Margaret Fitz-Allan and her little escort were likewise traversing that viaduct. The distance to Edinburgh was, as we have already stated, merely about seven miles; and thus between three and four o'clock in the afternoon Margaret entered the capital.

We should observe that Sir Casimir D'Este, when taking his departure from Roslin upwards of a fortnight back, had intimated where he purposed to reside in Edinburgh—for indeed he had been recommended to a particular hostelry by the Earl of Caithness himself. It was therefore to this hostelry that Margaret inquired her way; and on arriving there, she at once asked for the Teutonic Knight. But to her disappointment she learnt that Sir Casimir D'Este had departed on the preceding day, accompanied by his squire Jassent; and the landlord of the Golden Falcon—for such was the name of the hostelry—knew not whither the travellers were gone.

"It is however sure, lady, that he will return shortly," added the host; "for the worshipful Knight has left his mail-trunks in my keeping; and he moreover intimated that his absence would not extend beyond a few days. If it will please you to await the good Knight's return—or if you have other business to keep you in our fair city of Edinburgh—you will find no more comfortable quarters than at the sign of the Golden Falcon,—though I say it who should perhaps be the last to blow the trumpet of mine own house."

Margaret had already decided upon adopting the course which the landlord suggested; and she was speedily installed with her maid in apartments that were sufficiently comfortable—while the four male retainers were consigned to a different portion of the establishment. On questioning the landlord, the enterprising young lady learnt that the King was at Holyrood; and she resolved to lose no time in seeking an interview with his Majesty. She accordingly proceeded to make the requisite changes in her toilet; she apparelled herself rather with neatness than with richness, at the same time that her garb bespoke her to be a gentlewoman. Then,

attended by her maid, and by the youngest of the armed retainers so that he might have the appearance of a page, she set out for the palace.

The Holyrood House of the present day is not the Holyrood Abbey of which we are now writing: it occupies the same site, but it is not the same structure. The Abbey to which our history refers was razed to the ground by the English invaders in the middle of the sixteenth century, with the exception of the nave of the church, which alone survived the conflagration, and was subsequently used as a chapel. A spacious and a noble building was the Abbey,—having numerous courts or quadrangles, surrounded by cloisters, and with extensive pleasure-grounds attached. It was then altogether a monastic establishment, and bore not the designation of a palace. It had its mitred abbot and its brotherhood of monks: it likewise had its prison for criminals,—but its altar served as a sanctuary for whomsoever a dread of the law drove thither to seek such refuge. Tradition declared that an angel had appeared to King David I, the founder of the Abbey, and placed in his hands a silver cross, or rood, as a proof of heaven's recognition of his piety; and that this cross, on being assigned to the chapel of the newly established institution, originated the name of Holyrood. The rood was taken by King David II—the monarch who figures in our tale—when he set out on the expedition which terminated with the overthrow at Nevill's Cross; and there the holy relic fell into the hands of the English, by whom it was carefully preserved for a long time afterwards in the cathedral of Durham.

Although the Abbey of Holyrood was not a royal palace, yet King David II occasionally occupied apartments there, by leave and license of the reverend superior. When in the capital his general abode was however at the Castle: but in the present instance he was making one of the few exceptions to that rule by sojourning within the walls of the ecclesiastic establishment. All the suites of rooms surrounding the first quadrangle had been placed at the royal disposal; and it was with this quadrangle that the main entrance immediately communicated.

There the King was holding his court; and the rigour of monastic regulations which excluded females from admission within the walls, was suspended in deference to Majesty. Thus, on presenting herself at the gates of the Abbey, Margaret's request to be admitted to an audience of the King excited no surprise,—though in the granting of it some little difficulty was raised. It was then five o'clock in the evening: his Majesty had only just risen from the banqueting-table, where he had been entertaining the nobles attached to his person; and he had retired to an apartment to listen to the strains of his favourite minstrels. It was therefore scarcely possible, said the lay-brother who officiated as porter at the entrance, to disturb his Majesty at such an hour; for the usual period of granting audiences to persons on public or private business was between nine and eleven in the forenoon.

"Yet if it be possible to convey this request to his Grace," said Margaret, in the most urgent tone, "I shall ever hold myself grateful unto you. It is perhaps a matter of life and death, regarding one of the noblest peers of Scotland."

"In this case, lady," replied the lay-brother, who, being a young man, contemplated the handsome Margaret with no inconsiderable degree of interest, "I will forthwith ascertain what can be done. Step into my lodge for a few moments; so that you and this bashful following-maid may be beyond the gaze of those flaunting varlets of royal pages who are already thronging at the door of the vestibule."

Margaret, her damsel, and her male follower accordingly entered the porter's lodge, while the lay-brother proceeded to communicate the request to the senior page in waiting. This official deemed it absolutely necessary in the first instance to know the lady's name in order that he might mention it to the King; and this point having been ascertained by the friendly disposed lay-brother, the page ascended to the apartment to which the monarch had retired some half hour previously.

His Majesty—who had partaken with tolerable freedom of the generous juice of the grape, though he was very far from being intoxicated—was lounging indolently upon a species of elongated settle or sofa, listening with half-closed eyes to the melody and the metrical chant of his three favourite harpers. (On beholding the entrance of the page, the King demanded somewhat impatiently, "How now, Cochrane? Is my privacy thus to be intruded upon at an hour when you know I would be alone?")

"May it please your Grace," replied Cochrane, who was a genteel-looking but sedate man of about five-and-thirty, "a young lady has so earnestly craved an audience of your Highness, touching and concerning certain grave matters in which the life of a nobleman is involved—"

"A truce to the tale of a nobleman!" exclaimed the King, starting up from his indolent posture, and opening his expressive blue eyes quite wide as if all in a moment he had thus the power to shake off his drowsiness; "but tell me more of the young lady. Hath she the advantage of beauty as well as youthfulness? and what name doth she bear?"

"The eye, my liege," replied Cochrane, "has seldom settled upon a handsomer countenance—"

"Say you so?" ejaculated David: and he at once made a sign for his minstrels to retire. "But her name?"

"It is one Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan," answered Cochrane, "who entreats an audience of your Grace?"

An expression of mingled joy and surprise appeared upon the King's countenance, as he exclaimed, "By St. Andrew! the very damsel whose image was uppermost in my thoughts as those harping rhymesters were describing the heroine of their own metrical romance! Let the fair applicant be admitted. But comes she alone?"

"With a serving-maid and an armed page, as it would seem, sire," rejoined Cochrane.

"Then let the serving-maid and the armed page remain where they are," at once ejaculated the King; "and give their mistress to understand that it is contrary to all courtly rules for her to enter thus attended into the presence of Royalty. And hark you, Master Cochrane! Take heed that there be not a leer upon the countenances of those insolent underlings of your's who throng in the vestibule, at the moment when the beauteous Margaret passes through it. On the contrary, see that she be treated with all deference and respect!"

Cochrane bowed and withdrew; and when the King was alone, he said to himself, "'Tis strange that she should come at the very moment I was thinking of her!—though for that matter I have meditated upon her superb charms often and often during the fortnight or upwards that has elapsed since I beheld her at Roslin Castle. Yes—by St. Andrew! she is gloriously handsome!—and methinks there is a certain wickedness in those fine flashing eyes of her's. But ah! she comes!"

The door was thrown open, and Margaret Fitz-Allan was ushered into the presence of the King.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALBERTINA.

THE circumstances of our narrative now require that we should shift the attention of our readers to incidents that on this same afternoon were taking place elsewhere; and for this purpose we must return to Roslin Castle.

Immediately after the departure of Margaret, the Lady Albertina Roslin showed that she was determined to fulfil the promise made to her friend, and act with the energy becoming a chieftain's daughter. She had dried her tears—her lamentations were silenced; and though her heart was still cruelly afflicted, yet she was now nerved with an heroic self-possession. Naturally modest, bashful, and timid, yet there was in her a sufficient degree of spirit to render her equal to the emergencies that were only too well calculated to give an impulse to that latent strength of mind. She now summoned Hepburn and issued her mandates with firmness, clearness, and decision.

"Let messengers go forth," she said, "to summon a sufficient number of my sire's people for the defence of the castle in case of a still further development of the hostility of the Black Douglas. Let the pass-word be whispered to each vassal thus summoned: let the drawbridge be raised and the portcullis dropped; and let only those enter who give the pass-word or who are otherwise known to be friends. And on the summit of the Donjon let keen-eyed watchers be stationed, that at a glance they may sweep all the surrounding district and give us immediate notice of aught suspicious which appears within the range of their vision."

"All shall be done, lady," replied Hepburn, "according to your mandates."

Within the next two hours there were continuous arrivals of the feudal retainers now summoned to render service at the castle; and at the expiration of that interval upwards of a hundred men were under arms in the courtyard or on the ramparts. The watchers were likewise upon the Donjon—the drawbridge was raised—the portcullis was lowered. The Lady Albertina, attended by her maids, passed round the ramparts and traversed the quadrangle, speaking kind words to the assembled vassals, and in all respects bearing her part as became a noble chieftain's daughter. Her countenance was pale—but its expression was firm; and her voice scarcely trembled as she spoke. Her nerves were strung to the extremest degree of tension: she was making efforts unnaturally powerful to maintain this settled firmness of demeanour: but she was compelled to admit within herself that not for many hours longer could she endure so severe a trial—she knew that the moment of reaction would come, and that all her present fortitude must dissolve in a flood of passionate weeping. As she stood upon the ramparts and looked with straining eyes across the glen in the hope of seeing Fleming Fitz Allan's party return, with some sign of success, such as a pennon or a kerchief waving—she felt as if the tortures of suspense must suddenly cause her courage to give way: but still she did her best to sustain it.

It was now about five o'clock in the evening—the pursuing party had not returned—and Albertina's uncertainty in respect to her father's fate was every instant growing more and more intolerable. She retired from the ramparts to one of the sitting-apartments; and bidding her maidens leave her, she communed with herself, endeavouring to conjure up every possible idea, hope, and circumstance that might be calculated to sustain her courage.

She had not been many minutes thus alone, when one of her female dependants re-entered, with the intimation that a holy monk desired an immediate interview with her ladyship. Albertina ordered that he should be admitted into her presence; and the reverend visitor was accordingly conducted to the apartment. He was a man of middle age, with a long flowing grizzled beard; and he had a stern decisiveness of look which would have perhaps better befitted the warrior than the priest. But he bowed with courtesy to the young lady; and in a bland, mournful, sympathizing tone gave her the usual benediction. She did not know by his garb to what ecclesiastical order he belonged; but she knew full well that he did not wear the dress of the Cistercian fraternity at Melrose. With her wonted affability she desired him to be seated; and she then waited with some degree of anxiety for him to explain his business—for in the feverish state of her mind she associated every fresh incident with the circumstances that were troubling her.

"Daughter," said the monk, "I come to speak to you in reference to your father."

Albertina's heart bounded for a moment with a wild hope; but this feeling was instantaneously succeeded by a sickening sensation, as she dreaded lest something might have happened to her sire. She gasped for utterance; and the monk, perceiving her emotion, said, "Do not despair, daughter! Your noble father has sustained no injury—and no very long interval need elapse ere he again clasp you in his arms."

"Oh! say you so, holy father?" exclaimed Albertina joyously. "Then heaven bless thee for becoming the bearer of such welcome intelligence! Where is my father? is it he who sent you unto me?"

"It is he, lady," replied the monk. "As a proof thereof, he gave me his signet-ring, bidding me present it unto thee as a token that I am a messenger in whom you may put implicit faith."

The beauteous Albertina took the ring and pressed it to her lips; and then she said, "But apart from this token, holy father, I should have reposed confidence in you; for the ministers of the Church and the preachers of the holy Gospel are not wont to practise treacheries—but it is their office to aid the cause of truth, and right, and justice."

"True, daughter!" said the monk, crossing himself. "Though a humble member of the Church, yet Father Julius, who now addresses you, is not the least devoted in executing all its pious offices."

"I believe you, holy father," said Albertina. "But what communication do you bring me from my sire? what intelligence is this token"—and she placed the signet-ring upon her finger—"intended to herald?"

"Your noble father, lady, the Earl of Caithness," continued the monk, "is detained at a place at no great distance hence. He desires to have an immediate interview with you—"

"I will go to him, holy father!" exclaimed Albertina, rising from her seat, her delicately beautiful frame quivering with joyous hopefulness, and with anxiety to behold her sire. "I will but summon a fitting escort of my people—"

"Patience, daughter! patience!" said the monk: "the proceeding cannot be thus conducted, for reasons which I will quickly demonstrate to your intelligence."

Albertina resumed her seat—for her heart was already beginning to sink within her; and with feverish anxiety she exclaimed, "But you repeat the assurance, holy father, that my sire is in safety and that he may be speedily restored unto me?"

"I repeat that assurance, lady," rejoined Father Julius. "Within an hour may you embrace your sire—and at the expiration of another hour he may be within these walls!"

"Oh, a thousand thanks for this assurance!" cried the beauteous maiden. "And now indeed I can listen to you, holy father, in patience!"

"I need scarcely inform you, daughter," resumed the monk, "that your noble sire, the Earl of Caithness, was seized upon and carried off by the retainers of the Earl of Douglas—"

"And what motive of hostility does the Earl of Douglas entertain against my father?" inquired Albertina.

"Without pausing to comment upon the justice or injustice of that motive," answered the priest, "but simply to perform the part of an emissary, I must explain to you, daughter, that the spirit of the Earl of Douglas is chafed, inasmuch as the Earl of Caithness consented to become the holder, and therefore the executor, of the testamentary instructions left by the Knight of Liddesdale, to which the signature of the King was by some undue means obtained. It grieves me to add, daughter, that the Earl of Douglas has placed before your sire these two alternatives betwixt which to choose: either to suffer death—"

"O horror!" murmured the damsel, becoming deadly pale, and at the same time clasping her hands with a species of spasmodic agony.

"Or else," the priest hastened to add, "to surrender up the tablets containing the deceased knight of Liddesdale's instructions and the royal sign-manual."

"And the Douglas has dared thus to treat my sire?" murmured Albertina: "he has had the mingled cruelty and audacity—"

"Patience, daughter—and listen to me!" interrupted Father Julius. "Let us think only of the facts as they stand sternly and palpably before us; and let us not waste valuable time in useless comment."

"Pardon me, holy father," said the young lady deferentially, "for giving expression to my feelings: but I could not altogether conquer them! Proceed: I will not interrupt you."

"Those, lady," resumed the priest, "were the alternatives which were presented to your sire; and after due consideration, he has made his choice. He will live for the sake of his daughter; and he trusts to the noble generosity of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan to forgive him for whatsoever selfishness there may be in the course which he has thus elected to adopt."

"Oh! and Fleming will forgive him!" exclaimed Albertina, with enthusiastic confidence in her lover, and at the same time she remembered the assurances which our young hero had given her sire that he would sooner scatter the winds all his claims to the heritage of Liddesdale than take a step which should in any way injure his benefactor, the Earl of Caithness.

"Yes—doubtless," said Father Julius, "the magnanimous young Knight will rejoice that your noble sire, lady, should have adopted the alternative which may restore him in peace and safety to the home from which he has been snatched away. And now am I here—within the walls of Roslin Castle—a messenger from the Earl of Caithness—the bearer of his signet-ring as a token—to instruct his daughter in the manner wherein she must proceed to carry out the compact."

"Oh, tell me, holy father," exclaimed Albertina, quivering with impatience, "and I will hasten to do your bidding!"

"In the first instance lady," continued the monk,



"you must search in the place where you may happen to know that the tablets are deposited—"

"I know full well, holy father," interjected the damsel, "where my sire has deposited those tablets. Proceed."

"Possess yourself of them," continued the monk; "and then accompany me without delay to the place where your sire awaits your presence with those tablets as the means of restoring him to liberty. But you must come with me alone!—there must be no armed escort: for the retainers of the Douglas who held your sire in captivity, are few in number, and they naturally dread that if you proceeded to their hiding-place with a troop of armed warriors, the matter would be left to the issue of the sword instead of being settled according to the amicable compact agreed upon."

"But if Albertina Roslin pledges her word," exclaimed the damsel, proudly, "that she herself is incapable of such treachery, and that she will answer for the fair and upright dealing of the escort that she may take with her—"

"No, daughter—this cannot be!" interrupted Father Julius. "The Black Douglas and his retainers, being themselves treacherous, suspect treachery on the part of others. They have stipulated the mode by which the compact is to be carried out—your noble father has agreed to it—and the proof is in the transmission of his signet-ring as a token."

"Were I addressing any other messenger than a holy father or the Church," answered Albertina, "I should suggest that those who had carried off my father by force, had likewise by force possessed themselves of his signet-ring as a cover and a gloss for a foully intended stratagem. But if you, holy father, pledge yourself that you received your instructions direct from my sire's lips, and this ring, voluntarily taken by himself from his finger, I dare not—Oh! I dare not for a moment insult you by a scintillation of disbelief!"

"Daughter," replied the monk solemnly, "if even for a single instant you have deemed me capable of deceiving you, I would rather at once retire from any further meddling in an affair which progresses so ungraciously towards myself. I leave you, daughter. Farewell."

Father Julius rose from his seat, and was moving towards the door, when Albertina bounded after him, caught him by the arm, and with almost frantic excitement exclaimed, "No—leave me not! I meant not to give you offence! On my knees will I entreat your pardon!"

"No, daughter—I demand not this self-humiliation on your side!" responded the monk. "You have said enough to appease my somewhat wounded feelings. Alas! is it not strange that in this world mistrust and diffidence should so often throw their shade upon the deeds which the friendly disposed are prepared to perform with uprightness and sincerity?"

"Again I say, pardon me, holy father!" murmured Albertina entreatingly. "Yes—I do indeed see that you are all goodness and sincerity! Tell me therefore how to act, and I obey without further questioning or hesitation!"

"Yet must I say one word more on my own behalf and for mine own credit's sake," resumed the priest. "Bear in mind that I do not ask you to give the tablets into my keeping: I merely request that you will accompany me to the place where, as the price of your father's life and liberty, you will hand those tablets to the person who by your own sire shall be appointed to receive them. Now, lady, decide! But understand me well! All that now takes place is in strictest confidence between us;

and to no living soul within these walls—not even to your most confidential handmaiden—must you breathe a syllable relative to the transaction. For the honour of your sire is compromised herein; and the secret must rest with the fewest possible number of persons!"

Albertina sighed at the thought that the honour of her father should be involved in the alternative which he had adopted as the means of saving his life: but she said, "I have told you, holy priest, that I place my trust in you—and I will be guided by you in all things. Remain here while I procure the tablets."

Having thus spoken, the Lady Albertina quitted the apartment. She proceeded to her father's chamber: she touched a secret spring, which opened a panel in the wainscoting of the wall; and she took from a recess which was thus revealed, the tablets containing the Knight of Liddesdale's dying instructions and to which the royal signature had been appended. Having secured these tablets about her person, Albertina returned to the room where she had left Father Julius.

"I have found the tablets," she said: "I have them with me. What am I now to do?"

"Can you, without exciting suspicion or subjecting yourself to impertinent questioning, go forth from the castle in my company? Or would it be preferable," continued the priest, "that I should in the first instance go forth alone, and that you follow incontinently, so that we may meet at some given point on the opposite side of the glen? Thence I would lead you to the cavern, at no very great distance, where your father is detained a prisoner in the hands of his captors."

Albertina reflected for a few moments: and then having adopted her decision, she said, "It were better, holy father, that you should in the first instance go forth alone, and I will follow presently. For, as you have only too well observed, the honour of my sire is compromised; and alas! I am placed in the position of one who must dissemble, or at least avoid the chance of all questioning!"

"Then be it as you have decided, lady," said the priest. "I will await your ladyship on the opposite side of the glen, at the extremity of the path which winds through the wood. But tell me—is it needful to use any pass-word in issuing from the castle?"

"Did your reverence use any on obtaining admittance?" inquired Albertina.

"No," responded the priest. "The drawbridge was lowered and the portcullis was raised when I proclaimed that as a holy votary of the Church I sought an interview with the Lady Albertina Roslin, to invoke her charity for pious purposes."

"Then be assured, holy father," said the Earl's daughter, "that freely as you obtained admission, with equal readiness will you be enabled to pass out."

The priest pronounced the usual benediction as he took a temporary leave of Albertina; and he left the room. When she was alone, the young lady reflected deeply and seriously upon all that had just passed:—for a moment a faint suspicion of some possible treachery agitated her mind; but she banished it—and it was natural that she should do so, for her father's life seemed to be at stake and its salvation to depend upon the course which she should now adopt. Moreover, the monk's tale appeared to be consistent in its parts; and besides, Albertina's pure soul recoiled from the idea that perfidy could cloak itself with the mantle of the priesthood.

About half-an-hour after the monk had taken his leave of her, Albertina descended from the apartment, and by traversing several long stone corridors, she reached the neighbourhood of the entrance-gates

without the necessity of passing through the courtyard. She thus escaped observation, until the opening of a private door at the end of the series of corridors brought her to the immediate vicinage of the gate; and there she received the respectful salute of the sentinel who was stationed on the spot. Proceeding to the warder's room beneath the arch of the gateway, she desired that the portcullis should be raised and the drawbridge lowered: but she did not condescend to any untruth as a pretext for thus issuing from the castle. The warder and his assistants therefore naturally conceived that their chieftain's daughter, inspired by the same fortitude and zeal which she had previously been displaying during the afternoon, was bent upon continuing a personal inspection without the walls of the fortalice as well as within them. Her present proceeding consequently enhanced the admiration which her previous conduct had already excited.

Albertina slowly crossed the stone bridge; and ascending the winding path, she was soon lost in the wood to the view of the warder who remained stationed upon the lowered drawbridge, as well as to that of the watchers upon the walls. When, however, she recollected that from the shades of this very wood which clothed the deep shelving side of the glen, the fierce Borderers had rushed forth to make her father captive, she was stricken with a sensation of affright; and for a moment she was about to turn and flee back to the castle. But then she again succeeded in banishing all mistrust, as she said within herself, "No! he is a holy member of the Church, and he could not possibly deceive me!"

Albertina continued her way with renewed courage and hopefulness—sustained and cheered by the idea that she should soon embrace her sire, and that he would return with her in that same hour to his own home. The pathway upon the acclivity of the glen was threaded—the outskirts of the wood was reached—and now not a single scintillation of mistrust or shadow of suspicion remained in the mind of the beautiful Albertina; for she thought within herself, "If treachery had been intended, I should not have thus in safety threaded the dense maze of foliage which clothes the side of the glen!"

And now, as she glanced behind, the castle was again within view: she beheld the watchers upon the summit of the Donjon—and she marvelled what they must think of her wandering forth thus far from the walls of the fortalice.

"But they will be rejoiced," she murmured, her heart leaping with hope, "when they behold me return with my father!"

The pathway now led through a mass of crags, in the midst of which it was cut; and a few minutes' walk brought the damsel upon the verge of the plain where the lists had been laid out for the combat in which her lover so gloriously signalized himself. At a little distance Father Julius was descried sitting upon a broken piece of rock and awaiting her presence. He rose when he perceived her; and as she accosted him, he said, "Daughter, you have put faith in my assurances, and you shall now reap your reward. The Earl of Cathness will bless the confiding disposition of his loving child! Follow me."

Instead of proceeding any further upon the plain, Albertina was now conducted over the rugged masses of crags which overlooked the wooded slope of the glen. Thus the route was continued for about half-an-hour in silence; and by this time the Castle of Roslin had diminished into comparatively dwarfish proportions in the distance. The scenery was growing wilder—the ground more rugged and uneven:

but Albertina, who had known the district tolerably well in her childhood, was aware that there were several caverns in this neighbourhood; and she had no doubt that it was to one of these she was being led. She followed the priest in confidence, and with a fervid hope of speedily finding herself folded in the arms of her father.

At length they reached a place where the crags appeared completely to overhang a precipice below; but Father Julius, indicating a sloping path the existence of which Albertina had for an instant forgotten, said, "Give me your hand, daughter—and I will assist you to descend. The way is easier than it may at first seem; and there is no danger. But your ladyship ought to have a better knowledge of these parts than even I."

Albertina, naturally timid, shrank for a moment from the declivitous pathway: but the next instant, ashamed of her irresolution when the life of her sire seemed to be at stake, she summoned all her fortitude to her aid and gave the priest her hand. At that moment the tramping of a steed reached the ears of the young lady and her conductor: they glanced around—and from behind a mass of crag, they beheld a warrior in complete steel panoply riding at a little distance.

"Ah!" ejaculated Albertina; "it is Sir Casimir D'Este!"

"What!" cried the priest; "the Teutonic Knight? Come, lady, come!"—and it was almost with a degree of violence that he began to drag her down the sloping pathway.

There was such a sudden alteration in the tone of Father Julius—such a strange expression came over his naturally sinister countenance—and he seemed so anxious to withdraw her beyond the view of the warrior whose abrupt appearance had evidently so much troubled him, that a far stronger suspicion than at any previous moment she had experienced, flamed up in the mind of Albertina. Hastily snatching away her hand, she exclaimed resolutely, "I will first speak to Sir Casimir D'Este ere I proceed another step!"

"No—by heaven, you shall come!" said her companion in a fierce tone, and with looks of corresponding menace, as he again seized her by the hand; and the two or three steps which he thus forcibly dragged her down the shelving path, completely concealed them both in a moment from the view of the Teutonic Knight.

A shriek was about to peal from Albertina's lips—but the monk's hand was suddenly placed over her mouth; and at the same instant half-a-dozen of the Douglas Borderers came rushing up the pathway, they having thus emerged from a cavern in which they were previously concealed. The young lady, driven to desperation by thus suddenly discovering herself to be the victim of a detestable perfidy, struggled with such force against the hold which the monk had upon her, that she disengaged his hand from her mouth; and now the cry for assistance rang pealing from her lips. But the fierce Borderers seized upon her:—in wildest affright she glanced behind up the pathway—she just caught a glimpse of the brave Teutonic Knight springing from his steed—and then, overpowered by the various feelings that were so tensely strung, she lost all consciousness.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PATHWAY AND THE PRECIPICE.

THE scene of the occurrences which we have just related, was, as the reader may have comprehended, a narrow sloping pathway jutting out from the rugged and almost perpendicular face of a rock, and overhanging a precipitous abyss. This therefore was no pleasant place for a hostile encounter: but the fierce Borderers were on the one hand determined to retain possession of the beauteous victim on whom they had pounced—while the Teutonic Knight was equally resolute on the other hand in rescuing her from their arms. Nor was the warrior alone; for his faithful squire Jassent was close behind him, both having ridden to the spot and leapt from their steeds at the sound of that wild pealing cry which rang from Albertina's lips.

The course of the Borderers was instantaneously adopted and executed on the appearance of Sir Casimir and his squire. They were six in number. The inanimate form of Albertina was passed rapidly to the two who were hindmost; and they hurried her down the pathway towards the cavern, closely followed by Father Julius. The four remaining Borderers posted themselves, two and two, in the midst of the shelving pathway, to dispute the passage with the Knight and Jassent. They held their spears horizontally, thus seeming to present an impassable barrier; while their fierce determined looks, as they stood there motionless and silent, proved that it would be no child's play which Sir Casimir and Jassent were about to enter upon. It was a fearful scene for a combat! There was the yawning precipice on one hand; and the slightest false step, or the least impulse given in that direction, must inevitably be followed by a reeling over the edge and a plunge down into the chasm!

But it must not be supposed that because we have occupied some little space in explaining these details,—thus delaying the progress of our narrative—that there was any such halt or interval ere the struggle commenced. No! not for a single instant did the dauntless Sir Casimir hesitate. With a glance keen and rapid as that of an eagle, did his eye embrace the entire scene: he beheld the inanimate form of Albertina being borne quickly down the pathway by the two Borderers and the traitorous monk—he saw how the other four Borderers were resolved to cover the abduction and defend the passage of the pathway. Forth from its scabbard flashed the mighty brand of the stalwart warrior; a shout of "To the rescue!" rang from his lips, raising a thousand echoes amongst the hills and far down into the glen; and the cry was as loudly repeated by Jassent.

Then, as if it were a wild bull rushing on to clear for itself a desperate path—or as if it were a maddened tiger dashing on the hunters that sought its life—the Teutonic Knight literally hurled himself with all his force upon that little compact serried band of four which formed the human wall to bar his way. The points of the Borderer's spears struck with a clanging din upon his shield; and at the same instant his mighty weapon smote that one of the two foremost who stood nearest the edge of the precipice. Down through the iron casque went the falchion, cutting its crashing way and literally cleaving the head of the Borderer in twain! Over the verge of the chasm toppled the wretch—down he fell; and almost as speedily as the eye can wink, over went another—not slain by the sword, but impelled to destruction by the violence of the shock with which the Knight rushed upon the little party. Jassent, obtaining a footing on the almost escaped

side of the rock, but climbing a few paces up it by aid of the rugged indentations, now threw himself down, so to speak, upon the flank of the remaining two Borderers, so that one of them was sent after his two comrades down the precipice, his yells and cries ringing fearfully and exciting horrible reverberations. Another instant and the Teutonic Knight's weapon cut down the remaining Borderer, who fell back heavily upon the pathway. In something less than a minute the whole feat was accomplished—the human wall that had for a few moments seemed to oppose the passage of the Knight and his squire, was hurled down, as a house of cards may be destroyed by the breath of a child!

"Bravely done, Jassent!" exclaimed the redoubtable warrior, as with a spurning kick of his foot he cleared the path of the corpse which cumbered it; and the last of the four Borderers was sent tumbling down the abyss to join his comrades at the bottom.

On sped the Knight, with his good sword in his hand, and closely followed by Jassent. But in the meanwhile Father Julius, from the mouth of the cavern a little farther down the pathway, had witnessed the astonishing feat which we have recorded; and in mingled amazement and affright he communicated it to the two Borderers who were just depositing the unconscious damsel upon the floor of the cave. Not for a single moment had they anticipated such a result; and it seemed to be incredible. They rushed forth to assure themselves with their own eyes that their comrades had disappeared and that Father Julius had not become demented by some panic terror. It was all too true!—and down upon them was coming the Teutonic Knight, with Jassent immediately behind him.

"Away with the lady!" they shouted to the monk; "and leave us to avenge our comrades!"

Father Julius caught up the unconscious form of Albertina in his arms, and rushed down the pathway, which grew rapidly wider and wider as it descended into the depth of the glen. The two Borderers, not trusting to their spears, drew their swords with the stern resolution of covering the monk's retreat and disputing the passage. Vain hope! Down upon them rushed Sir Casimir D'Este with a shock as irresistible as that which their comrades had ere now experienced: his weapon clashed against both their own—one of the men was literally borne down by the violence of the attack—the other, with a wild cry, felt the soil at the edge of the precipice give way beneath his feet, and down he went, his yells ringing horribly along the glen. The man who had fallen, suddenly wound his arms round the legs of Sir Casimir, who thus for an instant was placed in direct peril of likewise being hurled over the edge of the dizzy abyss; but a slashing blow from Jassent's ready weapon suddenly disabled the arms of the prostrate Borderer, and the next instant Sir Casimir's falchion dealt the wretch his death-blow.

But where were the monk and Albertina? No longer to be seen! Down the pathway sped Sir Casimir D'Este, still closely followed by the valorous and faithful Jassent. Wider grew the path, as we have already said; and at a very short distance the escaped rock suddenly ceasing, revealed the bottom of the glen. There seven horses were discerned,—six belonging to the Borderers who had all met their death in defending the pathway—the seventh pertaining to the treacherous monk. Albertina had just recovered herself; and she was struggling desperately with Father Julius who was endeavouring to mount his steed with the young lady in his arms. The sudden appearance of Sir Casimir made the monk think of his own safety: he now sought to dash Albertina away from him

that he might leap upon the horse and take to flight; but the damsel, perceiving that succour was at hand, clung forcibly to him—and the next instant he was a prisoner in the iron grasp of Sir Casimir D'Este.

"Wretch!" exclaimed the Knight, "you shall pay the full penalties of your abhorrent treachery—and not even your sacred garb shall protect you! Hold him, Jassent!"

Thus resigning the captive priest into the hands of his squire, Sir Casimir hastened to sustain Albertina, who was again ready to sink to the ground under the effects of the excitement which this last struggle had produced. She speedily recovered a sufficiency of self-possession to pour forth her fervid thanks to the great warrior and his valorous squire for this happy deliverance; and then she said, "Let us hasten to the castle—or much alarm will be excited by my prolonged absence!"

"Secure you the prisoner, Jassent, in a suitable manner," said the Knight; "and contrive also that we take the whole of these steeds with us as the spoil and trophy of our success. Answer, Sir Monk!" added the Knight fiercely, "is it far from hence to the summit of the heights where you were first surprised in your villainous exploit?"

"The path, great warrior," responded Father Julius meekly, "winds upward from the glen to the plain; and some quarter of an hour's riding by this circuitous route will bring us to the spot where yourself and your squire alighted from your steeds."

"'Tis well," said Sir Casimir. "And now let our preparations be made."

Jassent compelled Father Julius to mount one of the steeds; and he fastened the monk's feet beneath the belly of the animal. Sir Casimir assisted Albertina to place herself upon the saddle of the second horse; he mounted a third—Jassent took possession of a fourth—and he so attached the other three together that he was enabled to lead them. In this manner the party commenced their issue from the glen; and during the ride Sir Casimir learnt from Albertina's lips the whole particulars of the memorable day's occurrences. Thus she informed him of her father's forcible abduction in the morning by the retainers of the Earl of Douglas—of Margaret Fitz-Allan's departure for Edinburgh—and of the iniquitous stratagem by means of which she herself had been ere now decoyed away from the castle. Sir Casimir listened with grief and astonishment to the narrative of the outrage perpetrated against the Earl of Caithness; and he expressed his fears that the party of pursuers led by Fleming and the Earl of Bassentyne would fail to accomplish the nobleman's rescue. It was with an equal amount of anger that the good Knight learnt how perfidiously Father Julius had borne himself towards Albertina; and he bent a menacing look upon that trembling culprit, who was riding a little way behind in the custody of Jassent. The tears flowed from Albertina's eyes as she spoke of her father, and of the cruel manner in which her hopes, after being so joyously elevated by the representations of the monk, were doomed to the bitterest disappointment.

"Now that the plot has so signally failed, fair lady," said the Knight, "and that your safety is ensured, it were useless to dwell upon the somewhat deficiency of caution which you displayed. Neither can I blame you when I reflect that your conduct was influenced by the purest and most admirable filial motives. But you will not take it ill of me, lady, if I suggest that in future you listen not so readily to such tales as these. Alas! treachery lurks in this world beneath the cowl of a priest as well as beneath other disguises! The whole affair

is a matter for further investigation; and it is therefore fortunate that this treacherous monk has fallen into our hands."

The higher ground was now reached; and there the steeds of the Knight and his squire were discovered quietly browsing upon the grass with which the plain was richly clothed. Jassent skilfully managed to attach the two horses which he and his master had temporarily used, to the others which formed part of the spoil; and mounting their own chargers, they continued their way, with the lady and the captive monk. On reaching the bridge, the presence of so singular a cavalcade, consisting of so many horses and such a comparative paucity of riders, naturally excited the astonishment of those who beheld the spectacle: but a few hastily spoken words informed the warder of what had happened, and the tidings quickly spread throughout the castle that the Lady Albertina Roslin had experienced most treacherous treatment, from which however she was rescued by the Knight and his squire, Hepburn and the numerous retainers who were assembled in the fortalice, gathered around their beloved young mistress to welcome her safe return; and they were fervid in the acclamations with which they greeted Sir Casimir and Jassent. In answer to a hastily put query, Albertina learnt that the pursuing party, headed by Sir Fleming, the Earl of Bassentyne, and Redman, had not returned—nor had any messenger arrived from them at the castle.

"We will now without delay," said Sir Casimir, "examine this perfidious priest, if a veritable priest he be; and perchance the traitor will be only too glad to save his miserable life by such confessions and revelations as may serve our own purposes."

This speech was addressed in an undertone to the Lady Albertina and Hepburn; and the Teutonic Knight then gave certain requisite orders to his squire Jassent. Sir Casimir accompanied Albertina to a sitting apartment: the lady hospitably ordered refreshments to be immediately served up—but the Knight would partake of nothing save a goblet of wine ere he had examined Father Julius. The monk was accordingly conducted into his presence by Jassent and Hepburn; and the demeanour of the wretched man showed how keenly sensible he was of the perilous position in which he had placed himself.

"Look you!" said the Knight, addressing him in a stern tone; "you have done a deed that is worthy of death, even were you ten thousand times a priest!—but your life shall be spared on certain conditions. These are that you give whatsoever explanations may in any way interest us, and that you speak truly in thus making your avowals and confessions. In this castle shall you be detained a prisoner until such time that your words may have been put to the test; so that if in aught you deceive us, death shall still be your portion; but if we hereafter find that you have spoken truthfully, you may count upon a restoration to freedom. Accept you these conditions—yea or nay?—or shall the mandate at once go forth to hang you as a scarecrow on the castle-walls?"

"Magnanimity and true valour are ever inseparable," answered the priest: "of the latter you, most worshipful Knight, have given many proofs, whereof your achievement this evening is not the least significant. On the former I throw myself, with full confidence that in dealing truthfully touching and concerning such matters as I may have to explain, I shall experience your merciful consideration."

"Proceed," said the Knight. "Tell me the tale after your own fashion; for full easily must you

understand that although we can tolerably well penetrate the motives which prompted such treacherous dealing in reference to the Lady Albertina Roslin, yet do we require explicit details."

"And these shall be given," said Father Julius. "Know in the first place, Sir Knight, that I occupy the post of chaplain at Tantallon Castle, a fortress belonging to the high and mighty Earl of Douglas—"

"As false a baron and as unworthy a knight as ever bore a lance or wore golden spurs!" interrupted Sir Casimir. "Proceed."

"For the last two or three weeks," continued Father Julius, "I have been sojourning with a reverend friend of mine in a village at no great distance. The Earl of Douglas, after the late encounter in the lists, sped to the Castle of Hermitage, where his lordship still remains—"

"Ah! then it is to Hermitage that the Earl of Caithness is by this time conveyed," interjected Sir Casimir, "if the plot of forcibly carrying him off has altogether succeeded—which heaven forefend!"

"Yes—to Hermitage," replied the monk.

The colour fled from Albertina's cheeks; she became very pale—and an expression of anguish flitted over her features, at the idea of her beloved father being borne to a fortalice with which such terrible incidents were associated. Sir Casimir D'Este perceived that change of countenance; and comprehending the reason, hastily whispered to Albertina, "Despair not, lady! I can full easily fathom the policy of the Douglas: his aim is to take measures to force Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan into terms which may lead to the renunciation of the rights which are his by the Knight of Liddesdale's bequest. Your noble father, lady—unless by this time rescued—is held as a sort of hostage: but he shall be delivered!"

The sudden hopefulness inspired by this assurance on the part of a man who was no idle boaster, and who seemed so fully able to accomplish whatsoever he bent his mind upon, brought the animating hue back to the damsel's cheeks; and she bent upon Sir Casimir a look of fervid gratitude.

"Proceed," said the Teutonic Knight, again turning towards the monk. "Is it not the case that the lord of this castle has been carried off in order that the Black Douglas may by certain means of intimidation forward his own selfish interests against the just rights of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan?"

"It is even so," rejoined Father Julius. "Magnus Balveny arranged and conducted the exploit by which the Earl was carried off. At the same time he bethought himself that if this scheme succeeded, it might be possible to inveigle the Lady Albertina likewise into his master's power. Falling in with me, he issued his command that I should aid and abet in this design; and next to disobedience of the commands of the Black Douglas, a neglect of those issued by Magnus Balveny is the most serious offence that can well be conceived. Thus against my will was I constrained—"

"Defend not yourself, Sir Priest!" interrupted the Teutonic Knight sternly: "facts speak for themselves—and we know what significance to attach to your conduct. Hasten to make an end of your narrative."

"I will therefore curtly say, Sir Knight," continued the priest, "that I assented to the task enjoined me by Magnus Balveny. I awaited him in the village where I was sojourning. Anon he and his party came dashing along, with the Earl of Caithness in their midst. Balveny gave me the Earl's signet-ring; and away he sped with his Borderers and his prisoner, leaving however half-a-dozen

of his men behind, under my orders. You know the rest. But I may add that if I commanded those half-dozen men to study so carefully the means of concealment in the cavern at the extremity of the glen, and there to remain in ambush while I worked by dint of stratagem, it was because I found that the retainers of Roslin were flocking from every direction towards the Castle soon after the carrying-off of the Earl of Caithness; and I feared lest there should be a conflict with my handful of Borderers, the result of which might have interfered with my plan."

"And if your iniquitous project had succeeded to the utmost," said Sir Casimir D'Este,—"I mean if both father and daughter had fallen into the power of the Earl of Douglas, what course would have next been pursued by that traitorous baron?"

"In the first place it was considered expedient," replied the priest, "to obtain possession of the person of the Earl of Caithness as a hostage, so to speak, and as a means of enforcing certain negotiations with Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan in respect to the Liddesdale estates. Secondly, it was considered still more advisable to obtain possession, if possible, of the person of the Lady Albertina. But the grandest stroke of policy of all would have been for the Earl of Douglas to get into his hands the testamentary tablets with the royal sign-manual. And there was yet another consideration—"

The priest hesitated, and glanced with timidity towards Albertina.

"Speak!" said Sir Casimir: "keep not back a single syllable which may in any manner interest us! What was that other consideration whereunto you have alluded?"

"The Earl of Douglas," continued Father Julius, speaking slowly and diffidently, "ventured to entertain the hope that the heiress of Roslin might not deem herself too highly placed to bestow her fair hand upon his lordship: and thus by means of an alliance betwixt the proud families of Douglas and Caithness, the bonds of former friendship might be restored and strengthened."

"Enough, Sir Priest!" interjected Albertina indignantly, while the warm blood glowed in anger upon her beauteous countenance. "Sir Casimir, have you further questions to put to this man?"

"I have, fair lady," responded the Teutonic Knight. "He knows the conditions on which he is now speaking: let him take heed that he answer me not falsely! Sir Priest, what is the number of the garrison at the Castle of Hermitage?"

"I learnt from the lips of Magnus Balveny the very particulars which now enable me to reply to this query. There are twelve belted knights doing feudal service at Hermitage Castle," continued Father Julius, "under the banner of the Black Earl of Douglas; and the soldiers of the garrison muster to the number of three hundred spears. In addition thereto there are a hundred billmen, drawing the bow or ready to wield the curtal-axe."

"Then, according to this estimate," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "there is an aggregate force of somewhat above four hundred warriors crowded within the walls of Hermitage. Is it so?"

"This is the precise truth, as I have a soul to be saved!" rejoined the priest. "And I will tell you more, Sir Knight, so that in no sense I may deceive you! The Black Douglas is resolved to maintain unto the very death his rights, as he asserts them, to the estates and castle belonging to his late kinsman the Knight of Liddesdale. I have now no more to say."

"For the present you must be detained a prisoner within these walls," observed the Teutonic Knight. "Heppburn, away with him!—but see that he be treated not too harshly."

Scarcely was Father Julius conducted from the apartment, and before Sir Casimir D'Este had leisure to make a single observation about the intelligence received from his lips, one of the watchmen from the Donjon entered the apartment and announced that the pursuing party, headed by Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, was just crossing the drawbridge. Immense was now the anxiety of Albertina: she would have rushed from the room to learn whether her father was amongst the band—but her limbs failed her—she was overpowered by the excruciations of suspense. In a very few moments the troop of horsemen rode into the court-yard of the Castle. Albertina now rushed to the window. It was indeed the pursuing party which had returned: Sir Fleming was there—the Earl of Bassentyne was there—Redman likewise: but the Earl of Caithness was not amongst them! The damsel's heart sank within her; for though at a glance she was assured of her lover's safety, yet her filial feelings were sorely distressed at the evident failure of the enterprise in respect to her sire!

Sir Fleming and the Earl of Bassentyne speedily joined Albertina and Sir Casimir in the sitting-apartment. They had already heard of the Teutonic Knight's arrival: they had likewise heard somewhat of Albertina's adventures—but with the minute details they were unacquainted. Their own tale was however first told. They had pursued the Borderers at the utmost speed to which they could possibly urge their horses,—ascertaining by the way, through the medium of occasional inquiries, that they were upon the right track; and they thus experienced no doubt that the Borderers with their prisoner were bound for the Castle of Hermitage. On they sped—for miles and miles they went!—but it became painfully apparent that those whom they pursued were much too far ahead of them to render it probable of their being overtaken. The distance from Roslin to Hermitage was fifty miles; and at least so much of this distance was accomplished as to enable the pursuers to compute only too accurately that the Borderers must inevitably reach their destination, along with their captive, a good hour before they (the pursuers) could even come within sight of Hermitage Castle at all. Thus, with reluctant hearts and saddened spirits, they were compelled to turn their steeds and retrace their way to Roslin Castle.

Albertina wept as she thought of her father: but the Teutonic Knight hastened to say some encouraging words. And now explanations were given to Sir Fleming and Roland in respect to all that had occurred since their departure. Warm were the expressions of admiration and gratitude which those young men poured forth in respect to the chivalrous conduct of the Teutonic Knight; but it was with a secret feeling of disappointment and sorrow that the Earl of Bassentyne found that Margaret was absent.

"And now what is to be done?" inquired Albertina, with feverish anxiety.

"Give me writing materials," said Sir Casimir D'Este; "and let some one get himself in readiness to repair forthwith to Edinburgh and bear my letter to the King. It will probably avail even more than the intercessions and representations of the heroic Margaret!"

"I will undertake the errand!" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne with vivacity.

"Be it so," said the Teutonic Knight; and without suspecting the reason which prompted this readiness on Roland's part to hasten to Edinburgh, the warrior bestowed upon him a smile of approval.

Sir Casimir's letter was soon finished; it was addressed to King David himself. He fastened it with

a silken string, according to the custom of the times—and he sealed it carefully.

"Into the hands of the Scottish Sovereign—and into his hands *only*," said the warrior emphatically, as he gave the letter to Roland, "must you deliver this missive. I need not recommend promptitude and haste: you, young Earl, full well understand the urgency of present affairs!"

"I will take with me but a couple of retainers," said Lord Bassentyne, "so that I may ride all the more quickly by being disencumbered of a numerous suite."

The young nobleman thereupon took his departure; and Sir Casimir D'Este said to Albertina, "Again I bid you despair not, lady!—for all that human means can accomplish towards the rescue of your noble father, shall be performed. Tell me, if it be in your power, what is the number of those brave warriors who owe feudal service to the Earl of Caithness?—how many can be mustered within four-and-twenty hours to march beneath the banner of Roslin?"

"That question can I full readily answer!" exclaimed Fitz-Allan. "Three hundred men, and those of the bravest, will respond to the call. But you must also bear in mind, Sir Knight, that our noble friend the Earl of Bassentyne will unite his troops with ours; and if your mind be set on active warfare—as I joyously see that it is—at least six hundred brave fellows may be arrayed to combat on our side."

"Good!" said the Teutonic Knight, who was committing all these *memoranda* to paper. "Let Redman be summoned hither."

The lieutenant soon made his appearance; and Sir Casimir D'Este questioned him minutely in reference to the number of suits of panoply which the armoury of the castle could furnish—the quantities and varieties of weapons which could likewise be rendered available—and several other points on which he desired information. To all these queries Redman answered with precision; and the details were duly recorded amongst the written notes upon the paper.

Thus half an hour was spent, after the departure of the young Earl of Bassentyne; and now that the Teutonic Knight had transacted the business which he deemed immediately requisite, he began to think of taking refreshments. But just at this moment a messenger arrived at Roslin Castle from Melrose Abbey, bearing a despatch which he was charged to deliver in all haste to Sir Casimir D'Este. The Knight opened the packet; and when he had read its contents, a gleam of satisfaction shot athwart his countenance.

"Everything progresses favourably to my wishes," he said. "But there is now no time for explanation! Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, you must at once set out for Edinburgh. Hasten to array yourself in knightly style—put on your armour—bid Seton and another page or two make their own preparations to accompany you—and to horse with the least possible delay! Had this despatch arrived half an hour sooner, it would have saved the Earl of Bassentyne the journey which he has undertaken—But of that no matter!"

"In all things, my excellent friend," replied Sir Fleming, "will I do your bidding. Heaven has sent you amongst us for the best of purposes! Yes—blindly will I obey you as a leader and chief!"

Thus speaking, the youth wrung the hand of the Teutonic Knight, and he hastened from the apartment.

"Do not question me, Lady Albertina," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "in reference to these proceedings! Let it be sufficient for you to know that I

am working for the benefit of all those in whom I am interested!"

"That assurance suffices, best of friends!" exclaimed the grateful Albertina. "I am now full of hope and confidence; for I see that everything over which your influence is brought to bear, progresses prosperously and well! In my father's absence you must hold yourself as the presiding authority here: for you perceive how gladly and proudly Sir Fleming will serve under your orders! Oh, Sir Casimir!" added the young lady enthusiastically, "when I look at you, it seems as if I were regarding one who was born to command his fellow-men!"

A smile appeared upon the countenance of the Teutonic Knight, and a transient glow for an instant animated his cheeks: but the next moment his demeanour was calm and sedate as usual.

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan made his appearance, completely arrayed in a suit of steel panoply; and Albertina bent a look of mingled tenderness and admiration upon her lover. His fine dark eyes flashed back a reciprocal regard; and for a moment Sir Casimir D'Este affected to be referring to the despatch which had arrived from Melrose—for he did not choose to suffer the young lovers to perceive that he was acquainted with their secret.

"The instructions I have to give you, my young friend," he said to Fleming Fitz-Allan, at the same time drawing a ring from his finger, "are brief. Immediately upon arriving at Edinburgh—no matter for the lateness of the hour—proceed straight to Holyrood, and demand an audience of the King. Go thither alone—take not your followers with you;—leave them at the hostelry of the Golden Falcon—for it is needless to appear with any state or ceremony in the presence of the Sovereign. Present that ring to his Majesty—and you will see the result. I need say no more—your own intelligence will suffice for the rest!"

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, having taken leave of Albertina and the Teutonic Knight, set out for Edinburgh, attended by Malcolm Seton and by three other pages. It was now near nine o'clock in the evening; and he knew that an hour's riding would, if there were no mishap, take his little party to the metropolis.

CHAPTER XX.

MARGARET AND THE KING.

To the Scottish capital the thread of our narrative again conveys us; and we once more penetrate with our readers to the interior of Holyrood Abbey.

We left Margaret Fitz-Allan at the moment when she was conducted by Cochrane, the senior page in waiting, into the presence of the King. David had already dismissed his minstrels from the apartment—the discreet Cochrane at once withdrew—and Margaret found herself alone with Scotland's royal master. As we have said in a previous chapter, the monarch had been banqueting with the nobles of his household; he had partaken somewhat freely of wine—but though very far from being inebriated, he was yet sufficiently excited to be rendered somewhat reckless in his conduct, and to be all the more susceptible of the passion-inspiring influence of Margaret Fitz-Allan's superb beauty. As he beheld her in the simple yet neat and tasteful apparel which set off her richly moulded form to the utmost advantage—the masses of her raven hair falling in luxuriant tresses upon her well-sculptured shoulders—the tight-fitting corsage defining the contours of

the bust—the colour upon the cheeks heightened by the agitation of her feelings—and yet the air of a calm feminine dignity blending with the demeanour of profound respectfulness towards her Sovereign,—as he thus contemplated her, we say, he thought within himself that she was more faultlessly handsome, more perfect in her queenly beauty, than even his imagination had been depicting according to the impression it had retained of her appearance as he had seen her at Roslin on the day of the combat upwards of a fortnight back.

Advancing towards her with that courtly grace which was all unstudied on his part, but which he nevertheless knew to wield no mean influence when associated with the *prestige* of his regal rank and the advantages of a handsome commanding person, he took her hand, saying in his blindest tone, "To what am I indebted for this unexpected pleasure?—what seeks Margaret Fitz-Allan of the King?"

"Sire," she responded, "I come to throw myself at the feet of Scotland's Majesty on behalf of my noble benefactor the Earl of Caithness, against whose person a violent outrage has been committed by the Earl of Douglas."

"Ah! say you so, fair lady?" exclaimed the King, who had retained Margaret's hand in his own a little longer than was needful for the mere purpose of a welcoming courtesy: "we will investigate this matter. But rest assured that with all our desire to render justice to our faithful subjects, and to ensure the weal of Scotland generally—as the great sacrifices we have made for our beloved people only too well prove—the present case comes before us with additional weight when pleaded by language flowing from such sweet lips."

Margaret's looks were deferentially bent downward as the King thus spoke to her: she did not therefore perceive the regards of passionate admiration with which the monarch gazed upon her countenance—and she attached no significance to the terms of his phraseology, taking it only as the usual complimentary manner in which the stronger sex were wont to address the weaker in that chivalrous age.

The King conducted her to a seat; and placing himself opposite to her, at a little distance, he went on to say, "Tell me, fair Margaret, how all this happened, and in what manner you think that I can best serve the Earl of Caithness?"

"This morning, sire," continued Margaret, "the noble Earl, when outside his castle-walls, was suddenly seized upon by a horde of the fierce Borderers, and was hurried away. I fear, sire, that his destination was Hermitage Castle; and your Grace knows that Hermitage is a name which sounds fearfully ominous for any one who has the misfortune to offend any bearer of the name of Douglas. I should add that my brave brother and the gallant young Earl of Bassentyne"—here an involuntary blush suddenly appeared upon Margaret's splendid countenance—"at once set out with a body of men in pursuit; but I fear that it was too late!—and not choosing to leave anything to the chapter of accidents, I bade the Lady Albertina Roslin enact the part of a chieftain's daughter by placing her sire's castle in a state of defence, while I sped away to Edinburgh to throw myself at the feet of the King. And now therefore, gracious monarch, on my knees do I implore your royal intervention that the Earl of Douglas may, under pain of outlawry, restore his noble captive to freedom!"

Suiting the action to the word, Margaret sank upon her knees at David's feet. He hastened to raise her, exclaiming, "Rest assured, fair lady, that the King will do his duty in the present case—and perhaps all the more willingly," he added, in a



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lower and more significant tone, "because the exercise of his authority is invoked by one whom of all beings he would most gladly oblige!"

There was again a somewhat fervid pressure of the damsel's hand as the King retained it in his own; and now too there was that significance in his voice which it was scarcely possible to mistake. Margaret knew his character for gallantry, and even libertinage, amongst the fair sex; and for an instant she flung upon him a troubled look as she rose from her suppliant posture and hastily withdrew her hand. David, fearing that he had gone a little too far—or at least was proceeding too fast—at once assumed an air of respectful courtesy, as he said, "Be seated once more, Mistress Margaret; and we will discuss the matter under notice."

The damsel was reassured; and she took her seat. The King had noticed that blush which crossed her countenance as she had just now mentioned the name of the Earl of Bassentyne; and a suspicion had flashed to his mind. What was more probable than that the young Earl, thrown in the way or so handsome a creature, had paid his suit to her?—or what more likely than that she reciprocated the affection, or at least was dazzled by the addresses of one of Scotland's most brilliant nobles? David—a thorough man of the world in many respects—was shrewd and keen: he thought that he had fathomed a secret—but still, as he felt not certain on the point, he was resolved if possible to clear up the doubt: for it became a matter which might interfere with the designs which he had already entertained of making Margaret his mistress.

"And you tell me, fair one," he said, "that your chivalrous brother—and—who else was it that you named?"

"The Earl of Bassentyne, sire," she replied; and again, despite her wonted self-possession, the tell-tale blush for an instant appeared upon her countenance.

David knew very well whom it was that she had mentioned: but he thus forced her to repeat the name, while he keenly studied her looks, without however appearing to do so; and now all uncertainty was banished—he saw that he had a rival in the young Earl.

"And you fear," he continued, "that the party of pursuers may fail in rescuing the Earl of Caithness?"

"Such is my apprehension, sire; and therefore was it that I came to throw myself at your royal feet."

"It is no light matter," resumed David, "for even the King of Scotland to proclaim hostility to the Black Douglas. But how can I refuse any boon which you may demand at my hands?"

"If the lasting gratitude of one so humble as I," rejoined Margaret, "could possibly prove an adequate recompense—"

"Ah, that word *gratitude*!" exclaimed the King: "it is often used, in all its unmeaning vagueness, where the utterance of another word would be far more welcome—say, for instance, *friendship*!"

"The King of Scotland," answered Margaret, "is so highly placed as to be far beyond the influence of the sentiment of friendship on the part of one of his humblest subjects."

"The King of Scotland," rejoined David, "may single out from amongst the millions of his subjects a being whose friendship he would esteem as a pearl of great price—and what, Margaret, if you yourself were that being?"

The damsel for a moment gazed upon the monarch in astonishment and even with bewilderment; for she scarcely knew whether she had heard aright—and if she had indeed heard rightly, what interpretation she was to put upon language which

appeared to be rapidly and strangely passing the bounds of ordinary compliment.

"There are certain circumstances," proceeded David, whose voice was becoming more and more tender, and his looks more and more significant, "which place a monarch thus disadvantageously,—that when he addresses a subject in terms such as these, he inspires awe or mistrust, or he is regarded with incredulity and suspicion, instead of finding that for the moment he may be permitted to descend from his lofty pedestal and place himself on terms of equality with the individual whom he is addressing. Thus, from that individual's lips no reciprocal avowal comes! If it be a beauteous lady—as in the present case—the King professes his friendship, and he meets naught but regards of bewilderment and terror. How, then, dare he proceed even a step farther, and following the impulse of his heart whisper the words, 'I love thee?'"

Margaret Fitz-Allan started with affright: then all in a moment a joyous thrill swept through her frame. Was it possible that the King could be serious?—was it possible that she might become a queen? No!—the next instant she discarded the idea as preposterous, ridiculous, and absurd: her very pride was wounded that for a moment she should have allowed herself to be so far carried away by what she could now only look upon as a sentiment of the most egregious vanity: and this transient sense of humiliation produced its natural effect by arousing all her feminine dignity, so that the burning blush of indignation mantled upon her cheeks as she comprehended that the King's overture was a dishonourable one and that he sought to win her as his mistress.

"Sire," she said, "we are wandering strangely from the subject which brought me into your royal presence, and which is so grave and pressing—"

"Ah!" ejaculated the King, with an accent of petulance: "a rebuff? though thus delicately conveyed!"—then instantaneously resuming a mingled affability and tenderness of tone and look, he said, "Surely, fair Margaret, you may afford me a few instants of your attention while I speak with all truthfulness and sincerity? Listen, I beseech you! Though a King, yet have I the feelings of any other mortal: and who can gaze upon your charms without being interested and moved by them? If you knew how often and often I have thought of you since first we met at Roslin Castle, you would not be surprised that I should address you in these terms! I swear, Margaret, that amidst the galaxy of all Caledonia's beauties there is none who has ever made upon my soul such an impression as you have done! It was immediate—it was instantaneous!—and as my eyes settled upon you, a pre-sentiment flamed up in my mind, forcing upon me the conviction that you were a being formed to exercise the utmost influence upon my destinies!"

Margaret had listened with feelings which we can only describe as a species of consternation of joy—a rapturous bewilderment—an awful pleasure, such as one experiences when some startling instance of good fortune is announced, and which is followed by the dread lest proving too good to be a reality it should turn out to be all a dream!

"Yes, Margaret," continued the King, who failed not to perceive the full effects which his words had produced; "I love you—and now the truth is proclaimed! Ah! I conjecture—I suspect, dearest Margaret, that another has already pleaded his suit and has besought that fair hand! But tell me, is your heart so completely engaged to this other that when your Sovereign pleads his own cause—when he is even prepared to kneel at your feet—you cannot listen to him?"

Strong-minded though Margaret Fitz Allan naturally was, yet she was now seized with an agitation that made her tremble all over; while the colour went and came in rapid transitions upon her cheeks. She no longer thought that the King's overtures were dishonourable: she fancied that the crown of Scotland itself might be within her grasp;—and Oh! what were all her pledges to the Earl of Bassentyne in comparison with such a destiny as this?

"If your happiness, dearest Margaret, can be ensured by me," resumed David, "rest assured that it shall henceforth be my constant study! You shall dwell in a palace—all luxuries shall surround you—troops of servants shall be ready to do your bidding—the proudest nobles of Scotland will seek to do you honour, for they will know that where Margaret smiles the King will likewise smile, and that where Margaret frowns, there likewise will the King seem angry! Riches shall be lavished upon you—and as for titles, Margaret, the Earl of Bassentyne may give you the coronet of a Countess, but the King can place that of a Duchess upon your brow!"

Margaret's golden dream was utterly destroyed: it had deluded her for a moment—it had now vanished! The King sought her not as his queen: it was as a mistress that he dared to woo her! Again did the warm blood glow indignantly upon her cheeks—her eyes flashed fire—her superb form dilated, as rising from her seat, she said, "Yes, Sire, it is true that the Earl of Bassentyne has paid his suit unto me; and that suit is an honourable one! The blush which appeared upon my cheek when I first mentioned his name in your presence, was that of maiden pride at the thought of possessing a love of which I need not be ashamed: but the blush which now glows upon my countenance, is of a very different nature! I may live to wear with honour the coronet of a Countess which the Earl of Bassentyne proposes to place upon my brow: but I would sooner perish than wear in dishonour that coronet of a Duchess which you, sire, have proffered me!"

The King was not prepared for so complete and absolute a rejection of his overtures. Accustomed to conquests in the sphere of gallantry, he had flattered himself that he had merely to urge his suit with a certain degree of caution, and yet in a dazzling manner, in order to experience success. For an instant he was bewildered how to act: but quickly recovering his self-possession and hardihood, he said, "Be not angry with me, Margaret! I have tried you—and I now appreciate the excellence of your principles. At first I knew you only well enough to be enamoured of your beauty—I was unacquainted with your disposition: pardon me if I have adopted means that were somewhat of the rudest, in order to put it to the test! Tell me that you can love me—and peradventure you may find that there is no sacrifice which I am unwilling to make in order to prove the sincerity of my own love in return!"

Again did the golden vision envelope Margaret in its halo; and for a few moments she abandoned to the King the hand which he gently took, and which he was now pressing in his own. But as her eyes were bent down, and rapid reflections were passing through her mind, she caught sight of the ring which Roland had in the morning of that same day placed upon her finger: she was not so utterly depraved in her selfishness as to disregard her vows altogether; and withdrawing her hand, she said, "Sire, you may easily conceive that all this has come upon me so suddenly—so unexpectedly—that I am bewildered—yet would I not give your gracious Majesty offence—"

"And I, Margaret, would not for worlds," exclaimed the King, "torture your heart with uncertainties! I have proclaimed my love: it is for you to decide whether you can accept it—whether you can love me in return? I will not now press you for your answer. Promise me that I shall see you again in the morning:—indeed it is necessary for more reasons than one, inasmuch as the special business for which you sought me, demands the attention of the Royal Council—and that cannot be obtained in a moment. Say that you will return to me at eleven in the forenoon of to-morrow—and the course which I may pursue in reference to the Earl of Caithness will convince you whether the first boon which the fair Margaret has asked at my hands shall have been demanded in vain?"

"In this respect, sire," responded Margaret, "I rely upon your justice and your generosity."

The damsel felt the necessity of being alone with her own thoughts: she likewise felt that there was temptation in her present position, and that all her strength was needed. She therefore made a low reverence to the King, and hurried from the apartment. Cochrane was on the landing, ready to escort her back to the place where she had left her handmaiden and the page; and he treated her with the profoundest respect.

"I shall win her! she is mine!" ejaculated the King to himself, as the door closed behind her. "She will return to-morrow! Then will I place before her the coronet of a Duchess—yes, and a casket of the most splendid jewels! I will assign her a palace as her dwelling, with a revenue fitted for a peeress! And she will yield! There is more ambition than real virtue in her character—more of worldly selfishness than of virgin pride! Yes—she is mine! But Ah! this young Earl may nevertheless have made some impression on her heart—all rivalry is dangerous—and prudence now offers its suggestions!"

Thus mused the King to himself, while pacing to and fro in his apartment. He rang a silver bell which was upon the table; and Cochrane quickly answered the summons.

"My faithful servitor," said the King, "I have business to entrust to your discretion. That fair damsel who has just gone forth from my presence—what think you of her, Cochrane? Is she not fitting to become the mistress of Royalty? Yes—I read the answer in your looks! But even a King may have a rival, Cochrane—"

"And what rivalry, sire," asked the page, "need a monarch dread? At all events he may crush it—"

"True, Cochrane!" said the King; "and this course must be adopted in the present case. You know the young Earl of Bassentyne—it were idle to deny that he has many advantages in his favour. In a word, Cochrane, it suits me that for the present there should be no chance of a meeting betwixt this nobleman and Margaret Fitz-Allan. A few days—a week perhaps may suffice—"

"Your Grace's will shall be executed," said Cochrane: "it will harm not the young Earl that he sleep for a few nights in Edinburgh Castle. Trust to me, sire, to devise a fitting pretext for his arrest, if your Majesty can but indicate where at this present time he may be found."

"He is most probably at Roslin Castle," answered the King. "But understand me well! No deed of open violence must be done—naught that may attach suspicion to myself as the instigator—"

"Your Highness has often confided in my discretion," rejoined Cochrane; "and your Majesty's gracious condensation shall not now be misplaced. At daybreak I will ride with an armed party to—"

wards Roslin. There are deep woods in which we may be concealed—we will watch our opportunity—and doubtless in a short time the Earl will be captive in our hands."

"And then," added the King, "it were well perhaps if the report were spread that he has gone over to the cause of the Black Douglas."

Cochrane bowed, and withdrew from the royal presence.

Meanwhile Margaret had returned to the Golden Falcon, where she shut herself up alone in her chamber and gave way to her reflections. She had not been duped by the King's sophistry. She saw that so far from desiring to test her true character, he had really intended to seek her love on dishonourable terms: she saw likewise that he was deeply enamoured of her; and her heart thrilled with the idea that if her cards were well played, she might share with him the throne of Scotland. She asked herself deliberately whether in this idea she were yielding to the promptings of her feminine vanity? or whether she were reasonably calculating on what might be the effect of the monarch's infatuation? There was in reality something of both in the matter: but Margaret looked upon it all in the light most flattering to her own hopes.

Two or three hours passed: it was now nine o'clock in the evening; and Margaret's handmaiden entered the room to announce that the Earl of Bassentyne had just arrived at the Golden Falcon and was anxiously waiting to see her. Margaret's heart palpitated at the thought that already in her mind had perfidious intents with reference to the young Earl been harbouring: but instantaneously composing herself, she repaired to her sitting apartment, to which she desired that Roland might be introduced. In a few moments he made his appearance; and embracing her with fervour, he exclaimed, "Oh, the happiness, dearest Margaret, of thus beholding you again amidst all the calamities and perplexities that have occurred!"

It did her harm thus to find herself strained to his breast when she felt that he might perhaps full soon have reason to reproach her for her perfidy: but still, thoroughly worldly-minded, she inwardly thought, "If I fail to become the Queen of Scotland, I at least may become Countess of Bassentyne!" and therefore she appeared to greet him with a reciprocal fervour.

"Have you seen the King!" he eagerly inquired: "have you succeeded with his Majesty?"

"I have seen the King, Roland," she responded, with the completest dissimulation, so that there was not the slightest shade of a heightening colour upon her cheeks: "I represented to his Grace all that has occurred—and he has held out fair promises for to-morrow. But wherefore have you come thus suddenly?—has anything new transpired? is the Earl of Caithness restored to his home?"

"Alas, no!" rejoined Roland: "we failed in overtaking the Borderers with their noble prisoner. Sir Casimir D'Este is at Roslin; and he has despatched me with a letter for the King. First, however, ere proceeding to Holyrood, I halted at the Golden Falcon, to enjoy the pleasure of this interview with yourself, beloved Margaret!"

The Earl of Bassentyne then proceeded to relate all that had occurred to Albertina—how a treacherous snare had been set for her—how she had been rescued by Sir Casimir D'Este—and how Father Julius was a prisoner at Roslin Castle. Margaret listened with the most painful interest; and it was with no affected emotion that she exclaimed, "Poor Albertina! from what a fearful danger has she escaped!"

"And now, dearest Margaret," said the Earl of

Bassentyne, "I must speed to Holyrood to deliver the Knight's letter to the King! From what Sir Casimir said when he placed the letter in my hand, I have no doubt that it will confirm his Majesty in whatsoever good intents he may have harboured from the representations already made to him by yourself."

For a moment Margaret Fitz-Allan dreaded a meeting between the young Earl and the King: but the next instant her apprehensions vanished, as she thought to herself, "No! his Majesty will not afford Roland the slightest clue to aught that may have ere now taken place!"

Again the young Earl strained Margaret to his breast; and then he hastily quitted her for the purpose of seeking Holyrood Abbey. Thither he repaired alone, not deeming it requisite to be attended by the escort he had brought with him from Roslin Castle: for the circumstances of his mission demanded not ostentatious formalities or ceremonies.

Cochrane, the monarch's discreet servitor, was agreeably surprised when he found the Earl of Bassentyne presenting himself at Holyrood; and he thought to himself, "This is indeed a fortunate chance; and much trouble may be now saved!"

In the course of ten minutes the young Earl was introduced to the King—but not before Cochrane had for a few moments conferred privately with his Majesty. David received Roland with every appearance of the utmost affability and courtesy. The Earl presented the letter, which David hastened to open; and when he had read its contents, he said, as if quite in an offhand manner, "Perhaps your lordship has seen that young lady—I forget her name—Ah! Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan."

"Yes, sire," replied the Earl; "I tarried for a few minutes at the hostelry where she has taken up her quarters; and she informed me that your Grace heard with favour the representations she humbly made on behalf of the Earl of Caithness."

"True," said the King. "I promised that lady to take the advice of my Council early in the morning in reference to these grave and serious complications. It were now well, my Lord Earl, if you were to speed back to Roslin—or at least despatch a messenger thither, to convey an assurance to Sir Casimir D'Este—who is a most worthy Knight, and the representative of a noble Order—that his demands shall have the fullest weight with me."

The Earl bowed and retired, well pleased with the result of his mission, but making up his mind to remain in Edinburgh until the morrow, so that he should be enabled to escort Margaret back to Roslin. It was therefore his purpose to despatch a messenger thither with a billet for the Teutonic Knight. Cochrane escorted the young nobleman to the very threshold of the Abbey; and Roland placed in the royal servitor's hand a liberal reward for his seeming attentions.

It was now past ten o'clock at night: but a lovely moon, with its chaste company of stars, was shining in glorious argentine effulgence upon the city of Edinburgh. The Earl of Bassentyne was rapidly pursuing his route back to the Golden Falcon, when on passing through a narrow gateway which at that period existed in the Canongate, he was suddenly confronted by two men dressed in complete armour, and the vizors of whose helmets were closed.

"Resist not, my lord!" said one of them. "You are our prisoner!"

Scarcely were the words spoken, when the Earl of Bassentyne's sword leapt from its sheath; and though merely clad in a travelling suit, with no defensive armour of any kind, the chivalrous young

nobleman showed his resolve to trust to the issue of a combat.

"Ah! is it so?" exclaimed both the armed men, as if speaking in the same breath: and they at once commenced an attack upon the Earl.

At the first clash of weapons Roland's sword was snapped in twain. Quick as lightning he drew his dagger from its sheath; but his two opponents hurled him to the ground by their united force—for they had received positive orders not to take his life, nor to injure him more than they could possibly help. Thus overpowered, Roland for an instant seemed to be entirely at their mercy,—when another form, emerging through the gateway, suddenly threw its shadow upon the scene—and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, arrayed in complete armour, thus opportunely appeared to the succour of his friend.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE KNIGHT'S RING.

A GLANCE through the barred visor of his helmet showed our hero the aspect of circumstances, and revealed to his astonished eyes his friend the Earl of Bassentyne in the person of the prostrate individual whose life or liberty seemed at the moment to have been so seriously imperilled. It was the clashing din of weapons which had brought Fitz-Allan to the spot: his own sword was already drawn in his hand—and he rushed upon the two armed men. Beaten back in the twinkling of an eye, they took to sudden flight, and disappeared from the view up some court or round the angle of some adjacent street. Fitz-Allan would have followed them; but he knew not whether his friend were wounded—and if this were the case, the attentions that he would require were of far greater consequence than the infliction of any chastisement on his assailants. But the young nobleman, springing up to his feet, assured Fitz-Allan that beyond a slight scratch on the left arm he had sustained no injury; and by the aid of the silver moonlight our youthful hero ascertained that such was the fact. The sleeve of the Earl's doublet had been ripped up—the blood was trickling from the wound which the point of the hostile sword had inflicted: but it was little more than the mere grazing of the skin—and a kerchief being bound upon the arm, stanching the blood.

Explanations now took place between the young men. Fleming, on alighting at the Golden Falcon, had seen Margaret for a moment; and he therefore knew that the Earl was gone to obtain an audience of the King. He now learnt that everything appeared to progress favourably in reference to what was demanded of his Majesty towards procuring the liberation of the Earl of Caithness from the power of the Black Douglas. But who the two armed assailants could be—how their anger could have been provoked—or if their intent were perfidious, what object their treachery could have in view,—on these points the Earl of Bassentyne was utterly unable to give any information or even to form a conjecture. Fitz-Allan suggested that they might possibly have been lying in wait for some other person, for whom the young Earl had been mistaken; for that they were not common desperadoes, inspired only by the hope of plunder, was to be argued from the fact that each was clad in a suit of panoply of no mean price.

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan now explained to the Earl the reasons which had brought him to Edin-

burgh so quickly upon the heels of the other; and Roland expressed his delight that Sir Casimir D'Este should possess the means, however mysterious they might appear, of influencing the King.

"For monarchs," he said, "often promise that which they do not intend to perform; and we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that it is no light thing to demand that our own Sovereign should pursue a course of policy which is only too well calculated to excite the deadly hostility of the Douglas and all his powerful connexions."

"What the presentation of the ring to the eyes of David may produce, I have yet to learn," said Fleming: "but I must delay not in fulfilling my mission. Return you, Roland, to the hostelry, and await me there. Or, when I bethink me, I will accompany you to the gate of the Golden Falcon, for fear lest those unknown bravoes should be lying elsewhere in wait, to repeat their dastard attack on one who is comparatively defenceless."

"You shall not retrace a single step of your way, nor tarry on my account," exclaimed the Earl; "for now that I am placed upon my guard, I shall prove watchful and wary; and if the attack be repeated, those villains shall not again have the advantage of me. Hasten you, therefore, to Holyrood Abbey; for it waxes late, and the King may soon retire to rest."

The young Knight saw that it would be a species of imputation on the valour of his friend if he persisted in accompanying him to the hostelry; and he therefore urged not the point. They separated; and while the Earl proceeded in one direction, Fleming bent his steps in another. The former reached the Golden Falcon without further mishap or molestation. Margaret was awaiting his return with some little degree of anxiety; for she was yet too much of a novice in the actual practice of duplicities to be devoid of the apprehension of their discovery. She however at once perceived by Roland's manner that nothing had emanated from the King's lips to impair the integrity of her character in the Earl's estimation. As the reader is aware, she already knew that her brother had just arrived in Edinburgh; but she was now to learn that he had providentially become the means of rendering a most signal service to the young nobleman.

Meanwhile Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan had arrived at Holyrood Abbey; and on soliciting an interview with the King, he was at once referred by the lay-brother at the gate to Cochrane, the page in waiting. On mentioning his name, the young Knight found himself treated with the utmost respect by this functionary; for the fame of Fitz-Allan had been spread throughout Scotland—and moreover Cochrane thought it prudent to make favour with the brother of a young lady who he fancied was destined to become the mistress of the King.

"It is late, Sir Knight," said Cochrane,—"verging, I perceive, towards eleven of the clock:"—and he glanced at a clepsydra, or water-timpiece which stood in the waiting-room. "Nevertheless, his Majesty has not yet retired; and I will forthwith bear your message to the royal apartment. Doubtless your object, Sir Knight, is the same which has already brought your lady sister hither, and likewise the Earl of Bassentyne?"

"Ah! speaking of the Earl," cried Sir Fleming, without answering the question that was put to him, "reminds me of something the mention of which it were a sin to omit; for it would seem that even the presence of Royalty in the capital has not the effect of overawing the minds of evil-doers."

"Indeed?" said Cochrane, inwardly troubled by the remark, though his countenance in its unruffled

sedateness betrayed not that uneasy feeling. "Say you so, Sir Knight?"

"It is even as I tell you," answered Fleming. "Not many minutes have elapsed since two knaves in complete panoplies of steel, and with their aventayles closed, set upon my friend the Earl of Bassentyne; and ill might it have fared with his lordship if the din of weapons had not suddenly brought me to the spot."

"And I trust that the Earl sustained no injury?" said Cochrane.

"Naught beyond a mere scratch," rejoined Fleming; "and as for the braves, they at once fled, like cowards as they are. Meseems that the streets of the capital are perilous; for no watch nor patrol was at hand to afford succour—"

"Those sleepy burghers who undertake to provide for the security of the capital and of the King's lieges," said Cochrane, "are most inefficient for the purpose. All this shall be seen into, I promise you, Sir Knight. But you have no idea who the villains were, nor what was their object?"

"I could only surmise that it was some private vengeance which actuated them," responded Fitz-Allan, "and that they mistook the Earl of Bassentyne for another."

"Truly, it must have been so!" exclaimed Cochrane. "But time is passing, and I will now bear your message to the King."

The page issued from the waiting-room; and after an absence of a few minutes he returned for the purpose of escorting Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan to the royal presence. King David wondered exceedingly for what object this interview was sought by the young Knight; for he could scarcely conceive that after all he had said to Margaret and the Earl of Bassentyne in reference to the Earl of Caithness and the Black Douglas, another appeal was about to be made to him touching that affair. He almost feared that Margaret must have been speaking to her brother in reference to what had recently taken place in the royal apartment, and that Sir Fleming had come to ascertain what were the monarch's intentions with respect to that lady. Thus, being completely on his guard, David assumed a most affable air as the young Knight was introduced into his presence.

"Welcome, Sir Fleming," he said; "for though the hour be an unusual one for us to accord audiences, yet are we at all times willing to sacrifice our own comfort and convenience on behalf of our faithful lieges;—and none possess better claims upon our attention than a warrior who has so worthily gained our admiration by his prowess."

"My sincerest gratitude is due to your Majesty," said Fitz-Allan, respectfully inclining his plumed head, "for these most gracious assurances. I come from Sir Casimir D'Este; and I have the honour to present that worthy Knight's ring to your Highness."

"Ah!" ejaculated the King, with an air of the utmost surprise: "is it you, then, young Knight, who are appointed to a command which older warriors might shrink from undertaking?"

Fitz-Allan, according to the etiquette of the times, had sunk upon one knee while he presented the ring to his Sovereign; and as he now rose from that posture of respect, it was his turn to be astonished—for the words which had just emanated from David's lips were utterly incomprehensible to our young hero. The King perceived the air of surprise with which his speech was received by the Knight; and he said, "Surely there can be no error in all this? You tell me it is by the express desire of Sir Casimir D'Este that you have presented me this ring?"

"It is even so, sire," responded Fitz-Allan. "Sir Casimir D'Este is at Roslin Castle, where he arrived this evening; and there did he receive a despatch from Melrose Abbey—"

"True!" ejaculated the King. "That despatch was from the Secretary of our Council, and it bore the signature of our own royal hand. There is consequently no error!—and though I expected that ring to be speedily presented unto me, yet little did I anticipate that it would be borne by the hand of so youthful a warrior. As the matter stands, however, I give thee the sincerest welcome, Sir Knight; and I comprehend, by Sir Casimir D'Este's mode of action, that he has discreetly and respectfully left it unto myself to initiate thee in certain State-secrets of moment and importance. Be seated, Sir Knight—and we will at once confer together."

The King sat down as he thus spoke; and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan likewise took a seat,—while with strangely bewildered feelings he prepared to listen to the revelations that had been so seriously prefaced.

"Of your valour, Sir Knight," resumed the King, "you have already given the most signal proof; while of your discretion Sir Casimir D'Este must entertain the highest opinion when he fixed upon you for the performance of a most important duty. I need not tell you, Sir Knight, that I have bitter wrongs to avenge against Eng'and, and a burning hatred to wreak upon those fierce Southrons who for eleven long years held me in captivity. Nor need I do more than remind you that the defeat of Nevill's Cross is yet to be atoned for;—while it is a source of pain and humiliation to the mind of your Sovereign to reflect that the holy rood which an angel bestowed upon mine ancestor, hangs not within these walls, but graces the Southrons' cathedral at Durham. I must however proceed to inform you, Sir Knight, that certain negotiations which at one time were opened between myself and the English King—and which, if carried out, would have led to the restoration of that holy symbol—have utterly failed. You will not therefore be surprised to learn that it is my resolve to take early measures for the purpose of avenging all my wrongs against England, and of obtaining the blessing of heaven by the recovery of the silver cross and its restoration to the sanctuary of this Abbey."

The King paused: Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan was listening with the utmost attention and curiosity—for he could scarcely conjecture to what all this was to lead, though he saw enough to comprehend that through the kind interest of Sir Casimir D'Este something was in store that would tend to his own personal aggrandizement; and the significance of the prophetic lines chanted by the mysterious apparition in the vaults of Roslin Castle, came vividly back to his recollection.

"I must not hesitate to confess to you, Sir Fleming," resumed the King, "that I feel diffident in again setting the armies of Scotland in battle-array against the fierce Southron hordes. Not that my faith in Scottish courage is impaired. Heaven forbid! But the terrible wars which we have waged against our Southron neighbours, have decimated our male population; and it would be impossible to marshal an armament numerically strong enough to cope with the hosts that the English Sovereign might lead against us. And then too, it is with equal pain I am forced to admit that there is a want of union amongst many of the most powerful Scottish Barons; and the throwing-down of the gauntlet against England would prove a signal for disputation with one another as to who should hold the most important commands in the martial expedition. There is another point which must be like-

were borne in mind. Many powerful feudal peers are the advocates of peace, and would only be induced to enter into a war by the presence of a moral certainty of success. On all these matters have I for a long time past been reflecting;—and, to be brief, I arrived at the conclusion that Scotland is not at the present time in a position to enter, *unassisted*, into hostilities with the Southrons. Do you follow me well, Sir Knight?"

"I do, sire," answered Fitz-Allan. "Point by point do I mark clearly the explanations which your Grace is condescending to bestow."

"Some short time back," proceeded the King, "the good offices of the French monarch put me in private correspondence with Prince De Salza, the valiant and sagacious chief of the most religious Order of the Teutonic Knights. Negotiations were thus to a certain extent opened, until they reached a point at which it was deemed expedient either that I should despatch a trusty messenger to Marienburg, the capital city of the Teutonic dominion—or that Prince De Salza should accredit an emissary unto me. His Highness the Prince preferred the latter course: but it was agreed that the Teutonic Envoy should come to Scotland, under all circumstances of privacy, so that England might not obtain any premature idea of the grave matters that were thus in progress. The choice of Prince De Salza alighted upon Sir Casimir D'Este, who is described to me in a letter from his Highness as a most sagacious statesman; while we all know that he is a most redoubtable warrior. For the politic reasons to which I have already alluded, Sir Casimir D'Este came not with a numerous suite nor with pomp and ceremony, but as a simple travelling Knight, attended by a single Squire. Yet did he set foot in Scotland as the plenipotentiary of the Prince De Salza, furnished with full powers to carry out with me a negotiation on such terms as might be deemed honourable and fitting for both sides to agree unto. Again I ask, Sir Knight, do you follow me well?"

"Nothing can be more clear," replied Fitz-Allan, "than the language in which your Highness is shaping these explanations."

"Good!" said the King. "Now, to proceed a step farther, I must inform you, Sir Fleming, that Sir Casimir D'Este, acting on behalf of his princely master, has proposed to place at my disposal a force of twenty thousand Teutonic warriors, to fight beneath the Scottish banner against the armies of England. The conditions on which this proposal was proffered, or could be accepted, gave rise to some discussion between myself and Sir Casimir D'Este, and left the subject open for consideration. On my side I insisted, as a guarantee of the faithful allegiance of the Teutonic auxiliary forces to the banner under which they would come to fight, that they should be placed under the command of a Scottish warrior owing direct fealty to myself. To this Sir Casimir D'Este assented, with the proviso that he himself should appoint and nominate the Scottish warrior whom he might deem most fitting to take command of the Teutonic legion. Furthermore, Sir Casimir D'Este stipulated that when such nomination should be made, the Scottish warrior thus chosen for the command of the expected Teutonic auxiliaries, should have the right and privilege, on being presented to me, of requiring the fulfilment of any special boon that he might ask,—such concession on my part to be looked upon as a proof of my royal countenance and favour towards the warrior selected as General-in-Chief of the Teutonic auxiliaries. At the same time Sir Casimir D'Este pledged himself that the boon to be so demanded; should not prove of a nature which I,

having due regard to my honour as a king, a knight, and a man, might hesitate to grant. All that I have been describing to you constituted the basis of the conditions which were duly discussed between Sir Casimir D'Este and myself. I required a short time to consider them well; and for this reason did Sir Casimir D'Este remain for upwards of a fortnight in my capital. But yesterday the Knight intimated to me that he was about to pay a brief visit to Melrose Abbey, in pursuance of an invitation which to that effect he had received from the holy Prior, Father Benedictus. This morning, after a long and serious consultation with some of my most trustworthy councillors, I arrived at a final decision in reference to the proposal made by Sir Casimir D'Este and the conditions with which it was accompanied.* I resolved upon accepting the proposal on the terms and stipulations with which it was thus associated. The Secretary of my Council accordingly drew up a document to this effect; and therein a notification was embodied that whosoever might at any time present himself to me as the bearer of the signet-ring of Sir Casimir D'Este, should be at once recognised as the individual selected to wield the high and important command which circumstances may soon require. This despatch was sent off to Sir Casimir D'Este at Melrose; and thence it followed him, as you have already explained to me, to Roslin Castle. It would now appear that in anticipation of a favourable decision on my part, Sir Casimir D'Este had already made his choice of the Scottish warrior whom he would appoint to the command of the auxiliary force of his brethren;—and thus in all haste he sent you, Sir Knight, unto me as the bearer of his signet-ring. I have accepted the token—I have acknowledged the emblem—I have welcomed thee into my presence; and though thy years be so green, yet do I regard thee as the young General who is destined to play no mean part in the game of renewed warfare against our Southron foes."

It was with exulting soul, with throbbing heart, and with animated countenance, that our young hero listened to these final explanations from the lips of his Sovereign, and which explanations so materially regarded his own interests. Where was the youthful warrior who would not have felt proud in finding himself thus selected for the command of a splendid force to be detached from the ranks of the mightiest armament in Christendom? More than ever did Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan feel the prophetic power of the metrical lines which had flowed upon his ear in the vaults of Roslin Castle. Immense therefore though the responsibility of such a command would necessarily be, he hesitated not for a single moment as to whether he should accept it. For what said that prophetic legend?

"Be ever in thy purpose strong,
And swerve not as thou speed'st along
In this career of thine!"

Sinking upon one knee at the feet of the royal David, the young hero—his countenance glowing with pride, and hope, and joy—exclaimed, "I accept, sire, the important office for which my excellent friend Sir Casimir D'Este has chosen me, and which nomination has been so graciously confirmed by the lips of your Highness. Rest assured, sire, that neither in thought nor deed will I ever prove faithless to the Sovereign who thus generously confides in me—but that all my energies shall be sincerely devoted to your royal service."

"More, Sir Knight, you cannot say," replied the King, giving his hand for Sir Fleming to kiss. "Rise—and now exercise the right with which you have become invested. You have the privilege of

demanding a boon. Speak therefore? What asks Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan of his King?"

The youth was not immediately prepared to answer. Should he throw himself at David's feet, avow his real name, confess that he was a branded outlaw on account of the traditionary decrees of the Black Parliament, and demand the repeal of those decrees so far as himself and sister were concerned? Or should he, as the boon which he was empowered to crave, solicit the immediate fulfilment of a decree of outlawry and confiscation in reference to the Black Douglas and his estates, unless within a given period the Earl of Caithness were restored to liberty? Such were the alternatives between which Sir Fleming had now to decide. If for a moment he hesitated, it was not through any selfish consideration for his own interests in preference to a regard for the safety and security of his benefactor the Earl of Caithness; but it was because he said to himself, "Perchance, after all, in the species of promise which the King held out to my sister and the Earl of Bassentyne, his Majesty has already decided upon taking a vigorous step in reference to the Earl of Douglas?—and if this be so, it were useless for me to demand as a boon that which has already been resolved upon."

"You seem to hesitate, Sir Knight," said the King, speaking kindly and graciously. "Is it because you fear to ask too much? Fully confident am I that you will demand naught which in honour I may refuse to grant: and therefore be not afraid to speak."

"If, sire," responded Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, "there be no need to demand your royal interference on behalf of my benefactor the Earl of Caithness, I will reserve my privilege for use in another sense. My sister told me, ere now, in a few hurried words, how graciously your Majesty had spoken and the hopes which your royal words had held out; and the Earl of Bassentyne failed not to inform me of the assurance which he was ordered to convey on the part of your Highness to Sir Casimir D'Este, to the effect that the Teutonic Knight's representations should have the fullest weight with your Majesty."

"All this is true enough," replied the King; "and it is my intention to seek the advice of my Council on the morrow, touching and concerning the unfortunate affair which has bred hostility betwixt two powerful Earls. But I dare not anticipate how my councillors may recommend me to proceed in the case."

From this speech on the King's part, Fitz-Allan perceived that nothing was decisively settled in the royal mind with regard to the case thus alluded to; and therefore not for another instant did he hesitate in the course which he himself should adopt. His own personal interests were at once set aside, and all the sympathies of his generous nature were thrown into the channel flowing towards the benefactor who had supplied to himself and his sister the place of a perished sire. Again sinking upon his knee at the King's feet, Sir Fleming exclaimed, in a firm voice, "The boon which I ask is that your Majesty will at once agree to make proclamation of pains and penalties against the Earl of Douglas on being duly summoned to surrender up the person of the Earl of Caithness!"

"It shall be as you demand," replied the King: and proffering his hand, he again forced the young Knight to rise from his suppliant posture. "But inasmuch as I hold myself under certain obligations to your fair sister, Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan—and considering that it were most unkingly and ungracious to exclude her from the due enactment of her own gracious part in these proceedings—the decree which you have demanded shall be placed in

her hands to-morrow morning. Do you accompany her hither at the hour which I have already named to your sister; and all shall be accomplished according to your desire. Doubtless Sir Casimir D'Este, when despatching you hither in such haste, foresaw that such was to be the boon that you would demand."

"My sister and myself will have the honour of waiting on your Majesty at eleven of the forenoon to-morrow."

Having thus spoken, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan was about to retire, when the King detained him, saying, "Remember, Sir Knight!—all that has passed between us touching and concerning matters of warfare and of State policy, is strictly confidential! Not even to your own sister—nor to your bosom-friend—nor even to your ladye-love, if you possess one—must a syllable of all this be breathed. The seal of silence must rest upon your lips until such time as the promised auxiliary force of Teutonic warriors shall have set foot in Scotland. At present, therefore, the secret subsists betwixt myself, my privy councillors, Sir Casimir D'Este, and you!"

"Your Grace's commands," rejoined Fitz-Allan, "shall be implicitly obeyed to the very letter."

The young Knight then bowed; and retiring from the royal presence, he began to bend his steps hastily back towards the sign of the Golden Falcon.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HURRIED INTERVIEW.

WE must avail ourselves of this break in our narrative to inform the reader that the letter which the Earl of Bassentyne had borne from Sir Casimir D'Este to the King, contained an earnest entreaty that his Majesty would at once adopt vigorous measures on behalf of the Earl of Caithness. We must farther observe that when Fitz-Allan presented the Teutonic Knight's ring to David, the latter actually believed that Sir Casimir's motive and intention were that the youthful warrior should demand that interference as the boon which his nomination to the command of the auxiliaries entitled him to ask. He had already made up his mind to take vigorous steps in the matter, in fulfilment of his pledge to Margaret; and thus it really cost him nothing to grant the boon which Sir Fleming had required. He had not the generosity at the moment to admit that his conclusion was already foregone in this respect, and thus leave it to Fitz-Allan to demand some other favour on his own personal behalf: for David, naturally mistrustful and suspicious, was afraid of all mysteriously demanded pledges and of promises given in the dark. He therefore flattered himself that he had acted with consummate policy in the course which he had just been adopting—and all the more so because by means of one action he was achieving a twofold object—namely, maintaining the word he had given to Margaret, and at the same time seeming to grant offhand the boon sought of him by her brother. He knew likewise that they could not, by comparing notes, discover this little duplicity on his part,—inasmuch as he had placed the seal of silence on Fleming Fitz-Allan's lips.

To the foregoing explanations we should add that David was resolved to see Margaret again; and as he knew that she could not come alone to the palace without exciting a suspicion in her brother's mind that dishonourable overtures had been made



to her or were intended, he had expressed the wish that they should come together; for he trusted to his ingenuity to devise some means of finding himself alone for a few minutes on the morrow with the handsome and superb Margaret. According to what might then pass between them, should he be enabled to regulate his policy towards the Earl of Bassentyne. The King nevertheless saw that he had a very difficult game to play; for Sir Casimir D'Este had evidently conceived the most friendly regard towards Fleming, and it was likewise to be supposed that the same generous interest extended to Fleming's sister; and the dishonour of this young lady might lead to the destruction of all the grand hopes which his Majesty had entertained of avenging himself by a successful warfare against England. However, the wily monarch flattered himself that he should be enabled to conduct his various schemes in a manner suitable to his own views and wishes, and that his passion for Margaret might be gratified without the production of a rupture between himself on the one hand, and the Teutonic Knight and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan on the other.

While the King was reviewing his several projects, and estimating their chances of success without any inconvenient clashing, the delighted Fleming Fitz-Allan was pursuing his way back to the Golden Falcon. Little dreaming in how close a degree of relationship he stood towards the Teutonic Knight—and equally far from suspecting the use to which Sir Casimir had really hoped he would turn the right of demanding a boon of the King—our young hero experienced an illimitable gratitude towards that warrior for having selected him for a post in which he might possibly win a deathless renown. It was hard to be compelled to keep the seal of silence upon his lips, and abstain from rushing into Margaret's presence with the joyous announcement that he was entering upon a career of the most brilliant destinies;—but still that silence must be maintained! Therefore, on returning to the Golden Falcon, where Margaret and the Earl of Bassentyne were awaiting our hero's presence, his communications were limited to the compass of but a few words.

"I have seen the King," he said, "and was most graciously received by his Majesty. The presentation of Sir Casimir D'Este's ring had the effect of obtaining from the royal lips a solemn confirmation of whatsoever pledge he might have partially made to you first of all, Margaret—and to yourself, Roland, subsequently. With the utmost urbanity his Majesty has desired me to present myself with my sister at Holyrood Abbey at eleven of the forenoon tomorrow, when a proclamation decreeing pains and penalties against the Earl of Douglas shall be placed in our hands. You, Roland, may of course accompany us: for your rank as a belted Earl gives you the right of access to the King, and you are certain of experiencing a cordial reception."

But when the three had retired to their respective chambers, Margaret Fitz-Allan reflected deeply on all she had just heard. She comprehended that while her brother was present in the capital, she could scarcely go alone to Holyrood; and her natural intelligence quickly made her perceive that David had devised a pretext to obtain another interview with her. She still entertained the same golden dreams as those which had filled her mind after her meeting with the King;—she was still resolved to reject his suit if he continued to urge it on dishonourable terms, and to play her cards according to circumstances, betwixt the Monarch and the Earl, so that if she failed to become a Queen she might at least wear the coronet of a Countess. As for the

Earl of Bassentyne himself, he was as far from suspecting as Fleming Fitz-Allan was, that David entertained any dishonourable design in reference to Margaret. Both the young men conceived that the Sovereign's wish to see her again was merely one of those chivalrous impulses of the age which prompted kings, nobles, and knights to be most courtly and delicate in their attentions towards the fair sex.

The Earl of Bassentyne, not knowing what might take place between Fleming and the King, had already sent off a messenger to Roslin Castle to intimate the hopefulness which might be entertained in reference to his Majesty's sympathy towards the Earl of Caithness; and our young hero now despatched Seton with a letter for Sir Casimir D'Este. Thus every precaution was adopted to relieve of suspense the minds of those who were awaiting at the castle the issue of the various steps that were being adopted in Edinburgh on behalf of the captured nobleman.

Precisely at eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the ensuing day, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, Margaret, and the Earl of Bassentyne, presented themselves at Holyrood Abbey. They were at once escorted into the presence of the King, who was apparelled in the most sumptuous manner, that all the graces of his person might be thrown out to the fullest effect so as to produce the most advantageous impression upon Margaret. He had not expected to behold the Earl of Bassentyne in company with the brother and sister: but he was not particularly annoyed at the circumstance, inasmuch as the same pretext which he already designed as the means of leaving himself and Margaret for a while alone together, could be equally well carried out. He welcomed the handsome lady with an air of the most courtly graciousness, as it appeared to her brother and her lover: but to her own keenness of perception it was fraught with a significant tenderness. Towards the Earl and the young Knight his demeanour was polite and affable.

Having conversed for a few minutes upon some general topics with his visitors, King David said, "There are certain little formalities to be observed in reference to the case which is doubtless uppermost in your thoughts. A statement of the facts must be made to the Clerk of our Council, and duly attested by the signature of those who make the deposition. This fair lady need not be troubled with such dry details of business. It will be sufficient if you, my Lord Earl of Bassentyne—and you, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, will pass into the adjoining room and fulfil this requisite formula."

Having thus spoken, the King rang the silver bell which was upon the table. Cochrane entered—and having already received his instructions, he conducted Roland and our hero into the adjacent apartment. There the Secretary of the Council was seated at a writing-table; and perhaps he likewise had received a particular hint, for he delayed the progress of the business as much as he possibly could without exciting the suspicion that he was designedly doing so. Thus the King contrived to obtain a tolerably long interview with Margaret in the adjoining apartment.

"Dearest Margaret," said the King, as soon as they were alone together—and taking her hand, he carried it to his lips,—“have you thought well upon all that took place between us last evening?”

"Yes, sire," she responded, gently withdrawing her hand when for a few instants she had abandoned it to his clasp; "and methinks that your Grace has already disported sufficiently with the feelings of one whom you must have deemed a silly maiden—"

"Ah, by heaven, Margaret!" exclaimed David,

"if you think that I was trifling, you do me wrong! I was serious in all that I proposed—"

"If, sire, you were serious," interrupted Margaret, "your Grace must have regarded my vanity as being greater than my virtue; and perhaps if I dared reproach my Sovereign, I might add that it was unkingly and ungenerous to take advantage of one who came to throw herself as a suppliant at the feet of Royalty. In a word, sire, I beseech you not to renew the strain in which you addressed me—but permit me at once to rejoin my brother."

"Answer me one word, Margaret—answer me, I beseech you!" said the King: "have you either to your brother or to the Earl of Bassentyne breathed a syllable of what took place—"

"No, sire," rejoined Margaret proudly: "I restrained my own feelings rather than suffer my brother and his companion to learn that the King of Scotland had ventured to breathe a dishonourable overture in the ears of a maiden who came to him defenceless and as a suppliant!"

"This speech is cruel on your part!" cried the King, almost passionately; "for I swear by my crown and sceptre that in proclaiming how I loved you, Margaret, and how deep was the impression your superb beauty had made upon me, I was most truthful—most sincere! Speak not of dishonourable overtures!—deem not yourself insulted!—for if the same words had been mentioned in the ears of any one of Scotland's proudest and best-born ladies, they would have been received not as offensive, but would have been answered by a smile!"

"It may be so, sire," responded Margaret, with an air of pride and severity; "and pity is that Scotland's King, who ought to know his subjects well, should deem that he has grounds thus to speak of their morality. I am neither titled nor high-born; and yet the humble Margaret Fitz-Allan has her own pride,—that pride which will not permit her to listen to dishonourable overtures, even though coming from the lips of a King!"

David looked annoyed, surprised, and almost discomfited, as Margaret thus addressed him: but still there was so much admiration as well as passion in his gaze, that the damsel felt assured she was not proceeding too far, nor destroying the infatuation which the monarch experienced towards her. She therefore spoke with a mingled dignity and pride, as well as with a severity savouring of indignation, which had an air most genuine and sincere, and which gave her a queenly aspect. The heightened colour upon her cheeks, and the fires which flashed in her eyes, added to her beauty; while her attitude, though seeming to be all unstudied, was nevertheless a deliberately adopted one as the most advantageous for enabling her fine person to show itself off with the fullest effect.

"By St. Andrew!" thought the King within himself, "she is truly majestic in her mien!—she is royally handsome! She is fated to become a queen!"

He gazed upon her while he thus mused: she bent down her eyes—he took her hand—she suffered it to linger for a few moments in his own, that he might experience the influence of the contact; and then withdrawing it, she said, "Sire, suffer me to rejoin my brother."

"Margaret, Margaret," said the King earnestly, "I love you!—by heaven I love you! Will you not consent to be thus loved—"

"Oh! if the King offered me an honourable love," exclaimed Margaret, "I could—I could—"

She stopped short, she flung upon him for a moment a quick vibrating glance from out of the depths of her luminous eyes; and then her regards

were instantaneously curtailed by the long ebony fringes.

"What would you do, Margaret? Speak—Oh, speak," said the King, with impassioned tone and looks: and again he took her hand.

The damsel for an instant bent upon him the whole power of those splendid dark eyes of hers: she seemed to be trembling with emotion, as she said in a low voice, "If the King proffered me an honourable love, I could love him most fondly—most devotedly—in return!"

"Say you so, Margaret?" ejaculated David, whose passion was getting the better of his selfishness, his subtlety, and his calculating astuteness. "You could love me in return? Do you mean that you could love me as if we were equals—as if there were nothing in my sovereign rank to dazzle or bewilder—"

"I respect my King," answered Margaret, in a tone of the deepest veneration; "but I am not dazzled or bewildered by the glory of his rank. I repeat," she continued, now throwing a certain tremulousness into her accents, and sending forth look after look vibrating upon him as if smiting his heart blow upon blow,—“if he offered me an honourable love, I could love him—yes, love him with the sincerest tenderness in return!"

"And is it not ambition, then, Margaret," said the King, "which prompts your bold aspiration?"

"I have no ambition, sire," she replied, "to be other than an honourable woman, retaining in its purity that fair fame which has never been sullied, and the maintenance of which is above all other considerations."

The King was firmly impressed with the idea that Margaret's virtue was a genuine and truthful sentiment, and not for a moment did he suspect that it had all the coldness of worldly-minded calculation. The veriest libertine admires a virtuous woman: this admiration is forced upon him even in his own despite; and it is a marvellous auxiliary to the passion with which she has inspired him. It even chastens that passion, and renders him all the more anxious to possess her, though on the different terms at which a wife may be won from those on which a mistress may be bought. The King grew every instant more and more infatuated with Margaret; he could not endure the idea of losing her—and yet he still hesitated to pronounce the words which should offer to raise her up to become a sharer of his throne.

"You have said that you can love me," he resumed; "and this must mean that you can love me if I place a crown upon your brow. But that would be mere gratitude on your part; for if the sentiment be more tender, you must already love me! Love will not enter your heart at your bidding; and to promise that you can love, is to love already! If therefore you do already love me, are you prepared to make no sacrifice on my behalf—"

"Sire," interrupted Margaret, "every sacrifice would I make for you except the one that should brand me with dishonour! I might lay down my life for you—but I could not become degraded in my own estimation!"

"And what, Margaret—what," said the King, hesitatingly impelled by one sentiment to continue speaking, and by another to hold his peace,—“what, Margaret, if I were to propose that the blessing of the priest should hallow this love of ours—but if at the same time I were to implore that for several reasons our nuptials were kept secret until a fitting opportunity presented itself for me to acknowledge my beautiful Queen in the sight of Scotland and of the whole world?"

"Sire, if you be serious," said Margaret, "you have

already spoken enough to convince me of your love; and I am not insensible to such a proof of affection on the part of my Sovereign."

"You consent! you consent! Adorable Margaret!" exclaimed the King, his whole countenance beaming with rapture; and catching her in his arms, he strained her to his breast.

His lips touched her cheek for a moment: then withdrawing herself from his embrace, she said, "I do not consent, sire—but I do not refuse. A secret marriage has its dangers and its inconveniences—there is flight from one's home—disappearance from the midst of one's friends—the excitement of a thousand cruel uncertainties in the hearts of those friends—The sacrifice, sire, is very great—and it can only be made after deliberation, as well as under circumstances incontestably proving that all is genuine, honourable, and legal in the proceedings—"

"And by heaven, you shall have that proof, Margaret!" ejaculated the King, who since he had for a moment strained her in his arms, was scarcely any longer the master of himself. "You consent! Oh, you consent!"

"Hush, sire!" said Margaret, with a look of affliction: "methinks my brother and the Earl are returning!"

The King listened for a moment, and then said, "One word, Margaret!—one word! I fear that you must now return to Roslin—there is no immediate help for it! But if I shortly devise a means under all honourable circumstances for ensuring the solemnization of our nuptials, secretly and privately—and if you have no doubt as to the integrity and sincerity of the proceeding—what will you do, Margaret? what am I to rely upon? what hope dare I entertain?"

"Sire," she replied, with downcast looks—with a blush upon her cheeks—and with a bosom that was swelling through no feigned emotions; "I will be your's!"

She gave him her hand: he pressed it to his lips; and almost immediately afterwards the door communicating with the adjoining room was thrown open by Cochrane for the return of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and the Earl of Bassentyne, followed by the Secretary of the Council.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PURSUIVANT.

THE King immediately assumed an air of dignified composure, while Margaret at the same moment recovered her self-possession. David affected to be directing her attention to a curious old picture suspended in a recess; and he went on speaking as if unaware of the opening of the door. Then suddenly seeming to notice this fact, he turned towards the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, saying, "Ah! then, you have accomplished the requisite preliminaries?"

"Yes, sire," said the Clerk of the Council, stepping forward and making a low reverence: "the deposition is duly recorded, and it only remains for your Majesty to affix your royal signature to the decree of pains and penalties which has been drawn up."

"That will I do right speedily," said David: and he forthwith affixed his signature to the document which the official spread open upon the writing-table.

The Secretary of the Council appended his own name in attestation of the genuineness of the royal

autograph; and the King, taking the document, advanced with an air of the most courtly affability towards Margaret, to whom he presented the parchment, saying,—“As you, fair lady, were the first who came to demand our royal interposition on behalf of the Earl of Caithness,—and considering moreover that in all matters where polite amenities can be shown, the fair sex should take the preference,—it is to your keeping that I consign a decree which I hope will have the desired effect. But inasmuch as in all cases where decrees or warrants go forth from our sovereign hand to enforce the majesty of the law upon the disobedient, the presence of a royal pursuivant is needed to give due authority unto the same,—I hereby nominate Master Cochrane to that office. Understand me well, lady!” added the King, for a moment bending a significant look upon Margaret: “my faithful page Cochrane holds himself devoted to any service which you may think fit to impose upon him.”

Margaret made a profound reverence to the King as she received the document from his hand; and she expressed her gratitude for the royal intervention on behalf of her benefactor the Earl of Caithness. In a word, we need scarcely inform the reader that she spoke and acted just as if nothing of an ulterior nature had taken place between herself and the King. The Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan also poured forth their gratitude to the monarch,—from whose presence they were now conducted by Cochrane. They were escorted to another apartment, where a table was spread with refreshments, and where several lacqueys and pages were in attendance to wait upon them.

“Be pleased, lady,” said Cochrane, with a tone and look of the profoundest respect as he thus addressed himself to Margaret, “to partake of some slight refectory; while you, my Lord Earl—and you also, Sir Knight—will not refuse to quaff a goblet of wine to the King’s health. I go but to make my preparations for the journey which must be speedily undertaken towards Roslin, and thence peradventure to Hermitage.”

Cochrane withdrew from the room; and he hastened back to the royal apartment, where the King was awaiting his presence.

“’Twas well managed on my part, Cochrane,” said David, “to appoint thee on this mission. The fair Margaret must be mine, even though I pledge my royal vows to her in privacy at the altar! Why stare you thus at me, knave? as if thou wouldst fain ask, ‘What, sire! wouldst thou go so far?’ Tell me, Master Cochrane—is she not worthy of all the favour I may bestow upon her?”

“Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan,” replied Cochrane, “is doubtless worthy of that amount of favour which the King designs to bestow upon her, and which is all that he *can* bestow.”

“Ah! you think,” said David, “that the King has only to speak in order to win her as a mistress?—but you are mistaken! There is a stubborn virtue there, Cochrane, which stands upon the pedestal of its own pride, and whence it will not voluntarily descend: so that there remain but two alternatives—”

“And those alternatives, sire?” asked Cochrane, seeing that the King hesitated.

“Listen, and mark me well!” answered David, drawing close up to his confidential servitor and thus speaking in a low deep tone in his ear. “Margaret must be mine, by either foul or fair means! By foul means I would imply that she must become my mistress: by fair means my wife! If by foul means, so much the better!—and if you bring *this* about, the greater will be your recompense and reward! But if not by foul means, then fair means

must be adopted:—and she has already consented to a private marriage. Now, Cochrane, you are placed in a position to serve me in one of these two respects. You will either devise the means of placing the beauteous Margaret in my power: or if in this you should prove at fault, you will at least serve as a go-between in respect to me and her, so that the arrangements for the secret nuptial ceremony can be made. I now leave everything to your discretion: but see that you delay not in the measures that you may take—for my passion will brook not tarrying! And Ah, Cochrane! when I bethink me — But pshaw! the King ought not to acknowledge the existence of rivalry to be possible!—Yet still, Cochrane, seeing that you will be in the position to take note of all that passes around you, it may be as well to observe on what terms Mistress Margaret maintains herself towards—hem! you know whom I mean—the Earl of Bassentyne.”

Cochrane bowed, and issued from the royal presence.

“It will be strange indeed,” he thought within himself, “if in all these complicated plots I find not the materials for the construction of my own fortune. Either mistress or wife of David the fair Margaret is now certain to become;—and perhaps the cast of the die betwixt the alternatives shall more or less depend upon honest Stephen Cochrane. Yes, yes! I must see which game will better suit my own purposes. If Margaret become the mistress only, there will still be the secret of the intrigue to keep; and I as the depositor of such a secret, may use it well for my own purposes. But if on the other hand matters shall so fall out that I may stipulate my own terms with the fair Margaret by helping her to a share of a monarch's throne, then by all means let her become a queen! Betwixt the King's infatuation and the lady's ambition, there will be ample scope for the exercise of my wit—and the foul fiend take me if it be not developed for my own peculiar benefit and advantage!”

While thus musing, Cochrane reached his own chamber, where by the help of a junior page he quickly arrayed himself in a complete suit of steel panoply; and having issued the requisite mandates in respect to the accoutrement of his steed, he returned to the refreshment-room where he had left Margaret Fitz-Allan, her brother, and her lover. They were in readiness to depart; and they accordingly retraced their way to the Golden Falcon, followed at a little distance by Cochrane, who was mounted on his steed, and whose appearance was that of a royal pursuivant.

At the hostelry the preparations were quickly made for departure: the attendants who had severally accompanied the lady, the Earl, and the Knight to Edinburgh on the preceding day, were quickly mustered—all the horses were soon in readiness—and the party set out on its way to Roslin Castle. Margaret rode between her brother and the Earl of Bassentyne; Stephen Cochrane followed at a distance of some twenty paces; and the domestics brought up the rear. They proceeded at a smart pace; and there was consequently little opportunity for discourse: but during those periods when the circumstances of the route compelled a temporary relaxation of their speed, Margaret found a dozen different things to say to her brother, so as to avoid being compelled to pay much attention to the Earl of Bassentyne. At first Roland attached no importance to this circumstance, until the idea presently began to steal into his mind that there was really some slight change in Margaret's conduct towards him: but he was naturally too magnanimous and too frank in his own disposition to be easily susceptible of jealousy—and the ride of seven miles

occupied too short a time to enable him to form any positive opinion upon the point.

But what in the interval was passing in Margaret's thoughts? She felt convinced, from the significant look which the King had bent upon her during the last few moments she was in his presence, that he had appointed Cochrane to the post of pursuivant in order to establish a means of communication betwixt himself and her. He must therefore have whispered sufficient in Cochrane's ear to make him comprehend that while ostensibly he was an executive officer of the law, he was privately to consider himself the intermediary of a love-correspondence. Margaret scarcely fancied that David had gone to such an extent as to constitute Cochrane a spy upon her proceedings: but still, without having received any hint to that effect, it was natural that he should study the interests of his royal master, and report any levity (if he beheld it) in Margaret's conduct. Thus she reasoned within herself; and she saw therefore that it would be the height of madness for her to look tenderly upon the Earl of Bassentyne, or outwardly to betray that she received his addresses with favour. Hence her study, during the ride from Edinburgh to Roslin, to have the appearance of being more engrossed with her brother who rode upon her left hand, than with the young Earl who rode upon her right.

Roslin Castle was reached; and in answer to the anxious queries which were put by the returning party, the response was given to the effect that nothing new had transpired, and that no tidings had been received of the Earl of Caithness. The only item of intelligence was that ever since an early hour in the morning the lieutenant Redman, acting under the orders of Sir Casimir D'Este, had been summoning to the castle all those feudal retainers who had not obeyed the call on the preceding day.

Infinitely delighted and full of hopefulness was the beauteous Albertina, when on welcoming the return of Margaret, the Earl, and the young Knight, she learnt that their mission had been successful and that they had brought the royal decree from Edinburgh. Well pleased, too, was Sir Casimir D'Este, when on the interchange of the first few words he learnt that such was the case. But here we may as well offer a few explanations relative to the value and importance of the document which had thus received the royal signature, and which Margaret Fitz-Allan had brought from the capital. It was termed, as we have already stated, a Decree of Pains and Penalties, to be fulminated by proclamation from the pursuivant's lips against the Earl of Douglas and all who might aid and abet him in his illegal course. It opened by calling upon the Earl of Douglas, on his allegiance, to surrender up intact and uninjured, scathless and unhurt, the person of the Earl of Caithness whom he had most designedly and wickedly made prisoner. The decree went on to declare that unless immediate obedience were shown unto this mandate, the aforesaid Earl of Douglas was thereby proclaimed a treasonable and seditious person, and placed under the ban of the law as a rebel against the King's authority. Furthermore, all his castles and estates were to be deemed confiscated; and the same ban of outlawry, with the same penalty over person and chattels, should attach itself to all and every one who assisted, aided, or abetted the said Earl of Douglas in his continued disobedience. Lastly, it became lawful for all the King's lieges to combine and unite, with arms in their hands, to march against the Earl of Douglas and his retainers—to slay, disperse, or take them prisoners:—to capture their castles and seize upon their chattels in the King's name—and

to treat them in a word as a horde of outlaws and banditti.

Such were the powers and effects of a royal proclamation of pains and penalties, and which indeed differed but little from that other species of terrible decrees known as "letters of fire and sword." The reader may now therefore easily understand that no light nor trivial motives would have induced King David to adopt so extreme a policy against that nobleman who throughout all his dominions was the most formidable by family connexions, by ancestral traditions, by the number of his strongholds, the extent of his domains, and the multitude of the retainers whom he could bring into the field. Thus, no wonder was it that Margaret looked at the fulfilment of such a decree as a signal proof of David's intimated love towards herself: while on the other hand her brother Fleming, also in his own secret thoughts, regarded it as an important boon conceded to himself as the bearer of Sir Casimir D'Este's signet-ring.

After the hurried interchange of a few words on the part of the leading personages who had just returned from Edinburgh, and those who welcomed their presence at the Castle, Sir Casimir D'Este exclaimed, "Now that we have the King's decree in our possession, let our forces be marshalled, and let us set off towards the Castle of Hermitage! There is no time to be lost! My Lord Earl of Bassentyne, be pleased to hasten away to your own castle—muster your retainers—fling forth your banners upon the breeze—and with the least possible delay follow us in the speedy march we are about to undertake. If on arriving in front of Hermitage, your lordship finds that the Black Douglas hath yielded to the terror of the King's decree, so much the better!—but if it be otherwise, you will doubtless overtake us in time to bear your part in the storming of the castle—for such a fortalice is assuredly not to be carried at the first assault, but will for a few days, even if not for a week or two, keep us at bay!"

"I go, Sir Casimir!" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne. "Yoh march with the brave retainers of Roslin to-day: I pledge myself that the rising of to-morrow's sun shall see me also on the march with three hundred spears reflecting its bright beams!"

"Tis well, brave Earl!" said Sir Casimir, pressing the young nobleman's hand. "The Earl of Caithness will soon, heaven grant! thank you with his own lips for all the generous interest you have displayed on his behalf."

"And the daughter of the Earl of Caithness already gives her meed of thanks to the gallant Roland of Bassentyne," said Albertina, stepping forward and proffering her hand to the young nobleman.

According to the gallant custom of the age, Roland raised that hand to his lips: then turning away, he swept his looks around the spacious apartment where this scene took place, in search of Margaret. She had heard the words which had just gone forth from the lips of Sir Casimir D'Este; and she was inwardly rejoiced at the approaching departure of the young Earl, as his absence might save her from much perplexity and embarrassment in the tortuous game which she had now to play. The pursuivant, Stephen Cochrane, was not present in the apartment; and therefore Margaret was not at the moment under any restraint. Making a sign which was unnoticed by the others around, she hastily led the way into an adjoining vestibule: and thither the young Earl followed. Still true to that policy on which she had previously resolved, of playing her game betwixt the King and the Earl, she assumed a look of the utmost tenderness; and abandoning

her hand to his pressure, she said, "You are about to depart, Roland?"

"But let us hope, dearest Margaret," replied the Earl, "that my absence will not extend beyond a few days!—let us hope that I shall soon meet thee here again, and that our hearts will be cheered by the presence of the Earl who has been torn from his home! Yet ere I bid thee farewell, Margaret, renew the assurance of your love—"

"Wherefore, Roland," she asked, with an air of surprise, "do you require the renewal of that assurance?"

"Margaret," he said, hesitating somewhat; "forgive me—do not be offended—but I feared ere now, while riding from Edinburgh, lest by some means—and heaven knows, how unintentionally! I had incurred thy displeasure—"

"Think not so, dear Roland!" she interrupted him; "do me not so much injustice as to believe that I am capricious or whimsical—facile to take offence—"

"No, no, Margaret! I do you not this injustice!" interrupted Roland; "but I feared lest I myself, by some inadvertence—by some slight or neglect—by some deficiency of attention—in a word, dearest Margaret, if you had been offended, I should have taken all the blame unto myself, and I would have gone upon my knees to implore your pardon! Yet if there were indeed no coolness on your part—"

"Perhaps I was cautious, Roland," interjected Margaret; "and perhaps by being somewhat too much upon my guard, I may have seemed to be less kind in my manner than I could have wished? But remember that my brother knows not of our love; and methought that it was scarcely a fitting season to reveal or to betray our secret at a moment when all hearts are afflicted with sadness in consequence of the prisonage and peril of the noble Earl whom we all esteem!"

"True, Margaret—true!" said Roland, bending a look of indescribable tenderness upon the damsel's superbly handsome countenance. "I felt assured that I was still the same in your estimation to-day as I was yesterday, when I placed this ring upon your finger, and when you gave me your's in return!"

"Yes, Roland—believe me, I am not capricious!" said Margaret: and in spite of all her heartlessness, her conscience smote her for the dissimulation of her present conduct. "One word more, Roland, ere you depart! Let the secret of our love remain between us until all these sources of turmoil and agitation be ended, and until the restoration of the Earl of Caithness to his home shall enable you to enter upon those explanations with his lordship, which under all circumstances are so necessary. Thus, on my side, not even to my own brother will I breathe a syllable—"

"Let all be as you say, dearest Margaret!" interrupted the young Earl. "Thou art the mistress of my heart—and I now live only to do thy will and pleasure!"

He folded her in his embrace; and then speeding from the vestibule, he darted down the staircase leading towards the court-yard, where his suite were by this time mustered and his steed was ready caparisoned.

Margaret lingered in the vestibule to arrange the masses of her raven hair which had been somewhat disordered by the fervid embrace in which she had been folded by her lover; and she was turning towards the door of the apartment where she had left her brother, Sir Casimir D'Este, and Albertina, when she thought she beheld some object moving behind a colossal suit of armour which stood in a

recess in that vestibulo. She started with affright—she stopped short. Her eyes now encountered a human face; and a man in a complete panoply stepped forward. His visor was raised: Margaret recognised his features:—that man who had been an unseen and unsuspected witness of everything which had taken place betwixt herself and the Earl of Bassentyne, was none other than the pursuivant Stephen Cochrane!

A cold tremor seized upon Margaret; and all her perfidy struck her with the most forceful sense of its abhorrent hideousness. She expected to be overwhelmed with reproaches—to be threatened with exposure—or to be treated with the scornful contempt of a man who would deem it his duty to lose no time in communicating the discovery of her heartlessness and treachery to his royal master. Let the reader therefore conceive the astonishment which smote her, and the immensity of the relief which she felt, when Cochrane accosting her, said in a low but impressive whisper, "Fear not! Your secret is safe with me! I am your friend!"

He then abruptly quitted the vestibule, proceeding in the direction of the staircase; while Margaret, clasping her hands, mentally exclaimed, "The holy saints be thanked that it is no worse! But good heavens! to think that I should be thus exposed!—to think that I should have placed myself in the power of that man!"

A pang of anguish convulsed her heart: but in a few moments she outwardly regained her composure, and returned into the apartment. There she was immediately joined by Albertina, who said, "Come, dearest Margaret, to my bower, and tell me all that the King said to you; for I am anxious to learn what amount of interest his Majesty experienced on behalf of my outraged sire! Besides, I see that Sir Casimir and your brother are wishful to be alone together, while the troops are mustering for the march, that they may discuss their plans and proceedings."

The two young ladies accordingly quitted the apartment, where the Teutonic Knight and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan now found themselves alone, and enabled, as they indeed wished, to discourse on confidential topics. But most especially was this opportunity desired by our young hero; for though scarcely an hour had yet elapsed since his return to the castle, he felt as if it were a perfect age before he could thus find the occasion to pour forth the gratitude which filled his heart towards the Teutonic Knight.

"Oh! excellent friend!" he exclaimed, in a voice full of emotion; "how have I deserved the display of so much kind interest at your hands?"

"Were I pointedly to answer this question, my dear Fleming," interrupted Sir Casimir, with a most benevolent smile, "I should only be paying compliments to your various good qualities and merits. But we have little leisure at present for such species of discourse. Tell me therefore, my young friend, how fared you with the King?"

"Most graciously did David receive me," replied Fitz-Allan: "but, Oh, Sir Casimir! conceive my astonishment—my joy—when after having presented the ring, I learnt that, thanks to its magic effects, I was to be placed in a position far more glorious, more elevated than any to which even in the wildest of my most sanguine dreams I could have aspired!"

"And therein, when the time comes, Fleming," said Sir Casimir, "you will acquit yourself valiantly. But tell me—what else ensued at that interview betwixt the King and yourself?—for on my part I had previously revealed nothing to you—I deemed it more consistent with delicacy and propriety

towards his Majesty to suffer him to explain his policy, his views, and his intentions, entirely according to his own fashion."

"The King dealt most candidly with me," resumed Fleming Fitz-Allan: "his explanations were most minute."

"And in every sense, Fleming," said Sir Casimir, inquiringly, as he bent a searching look upon the youthful Knight's countenance, "you have reason to be happy?—you have every motive to be fully satisfied with the result of your audience with the King?"

"Every reason, every motive!" exclaimed Fitz-Allan, with a tone and look of grateful fervour. "How could it possibly be otherwise?"

"No—scarcely possible!" said the Teutonic Knight quickly. "And the boon, my young friend—the boon which by the possession of that signet ring you were empowered to ask, and which David was pledged to grant—"

"Oh, most frankly did the King acknowledge his obligation on that score," ejaculated Fleming. "He left it to my choice and discretion—"

"Assuredly," said Sir Casimir; "and so he was bound to do! You therefore demanded the boon?—you acted as any person of sense and discretion would in such a case? You stipulated for whatsoever might be nearest and dearest to your interests? Say, Fleming—was it not so?"

"My friend," exclaimed our hero, in some little degree of astonishment,—"surely, surely you must know what I stipulated for?—surely you yourself must have foreseen the nature of the boon I should ask? Oh, yes! it was only too apparent!—and in your generosity you lost no time in placing me in a position to demand on behalf of my benefactor—my more than father—the Earl of Caithness—"

"Fleming!" said the Teutonic Knight, thus suddenly interrupting our young hero, and speaking in a voice which sounded strange and peculiar; "do you mean that you asked for no other boon?—am I to understand that—"

"No other boon but the decree of pains and penalties against the Black Douglas," rejoined Fleming.

It struck the youth that Sir Casimir D'Este made a gesture of angry impatience, and that a fierce expression of annoyance—almost of rage—passed over his countenance; but if these manifestations of strong feeling did really occur, they were so transient that Fleming thought it quite possible his fancy might have deceived him.

"But, my dear young friend," said the Teutonic Knight, speaking with the utmost mildness and kindness, "the King would have assuredly granted the decree of pains and penalties in compliance with that letter of mine which Roland of Bassentyne bore to his Majesty—"

"The King seemed undecided and irresolute," observed Fleming; "so that I deemed it my duty—"

"You are a noble youth!" cried Sir Casimir, pressing Fitz-Allan's hand; "and you have acted according to the most generous impulses! But still you have thrown away a grand chance for yourself. The King may have affected irresolution and indecision—but rest assured that from the instant he received my letter, his mind was made up how to act. Therefore the privilege of the boon you might have exercised for your own special service, is lost, Fleming—or as good as lost!"

"Ah, if I had been sure of that!" exclaimed Fleming, his countenance suddenly smitten with a regretful expression.

"Yes—you have indeed thrown away a good chance!" exclaimed Sir Casimir; "and your own

nearest and dearest interests have been uselessly sacrificed——”

“My nearest and dearest interests?” repeated Sir Fleming, fixing his eyes inquiringly upon the countenance of the Teutonic Knight. “Is it possible that you have any special knowledge of certain mysteries?—and am I to surmise that you had any hidden motive for placing it in my power to demand a boon of the King——”

“Look you, my dear Fleming,” interrupted Sir Casimir; “every young man when first entering upon the world, has some purpose more or less important, which may be served—some object of more or less moment to attain. In a word, there are a thousand ways in which the interests of a youth in your position could be advanced——But, Ah! the bugles sound! Enough of this topic for the present, Fleming! You have thrown away the chance which I placed in your hand—but let us trust to the progress of circumstances, aided by the smiles of fortune, to turn up another such chance—and then you will know how to avail yourself of it! For the present let us get to horse!—and away at the head of Roslin’s brave vassals to the banks of the Hermitage!”

Within a quarter of an hour after these words were spoken, a procession of some two hundred and fifty warriors were seen traversing the stone bridge across the glen; and the two chiefs who rode in front—Sir Casimir D’Este and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan—inclined their plumed heads in acknowledgment of the kerchiefs that were waving in the hands of Margaret and Albertina on the summit of the Donjon-tower.

When that little armament had gone forth, the drawbridge was raised and the portcullis was dropped; for there were now only fifty armed retainers, in addition to the male domestics of the establishment, under the command of the lieutenant Redman, remaining within the walls of the fortalice for its defence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CASTLE OF HERMITAGE.

THE Castle of Hermitage, standing upon the bank of the little river of the same name, was one of the most formidable Border-strongholds belonging to the period of which we are writing. Defended on the south side by the river which rolled with the fury of a torrent, and on the other three sides by deep morasses, the castle was as much indebted on the score of its strength to the natural advantages of the site which had been chosen by its founder, as to the massiveness of its Donjon with a double tower, its high broad ramparts, and its flanking defence-works. There is still a Castle of Hermitage; but though standing on the same ground, it is not the same structure as that to which we are alluding. The Hermitage which was so memorably associated with the name of Douglas, and which was the scene of so many furious conflicts sieges and defences, as well as of dark deeds of crime, was a grim and gloomy edifice frowning from its elevation above the green miasmatic morasses, the broad moat fed from the river, and that river itself, which pursued its rushing way, boiling and foaming in cataracts and torrents, amidst masses of overhanging foliage and broken crags.

There, within the walls of that castle, had been perpetrated the hideous murder of Sir Alexander Ramsay, of Dalhousie, and to which crime allusion has been already made. It was said that within

the vast edifice there were trapdoors and secret passages, leading to subterranean involved in a darkness of Cimmerian congeniality with the deeds that were often accomplished there. When the Knight of Liddesdale had made the castle his home previous to his capture at Nevill’s Cross, rumour was often busy with mysterious whispers of the transactions that took place within that gloomy fortalice,—how beautiful maidens had been borne as captives thither, and had only gone forth again in sorrow and dishonour,—and how other foemen besides Sir Alexander Ramsay, had paid terrible penalties for the hostility that they had been venturesome enough to entertain towards the fierce Knight of Liddesdale. The peasantry living in the district of Liddesdale, as that part of the country was then called, regarded the gloomy fortalice with a species of superstitious terror; and many a wild legend was told in reference to deeds, real or imaginary, that had occurred within its walls.

We are now about to penetrate into the interior of that castle. The sole entrance was situated on the western side, and was constituted by a narrow causeway on the bank of the river, leading towards a high portal-arch, overhung by the massive projecting battlements on the summit of the outer wall. There was an inner wall, a few paces behind the external one; and both walls were furnished, in the neighbourhood of the portals, with loopholes and apertures for the discharge of arrows, arquebus bolts, stones, and other missiles. From the gate in the inner wall a passage of somewhat narrow dimensions led into the court-yard, in the midst of which the Donjon stood, dominating all the surrounding buildings.

THE Castle of Hermitage was not furnished with any degree approaching the style of magnificence which characterized Roslin. For eighteen years its rightful lord, the old Knight of Liddesdale, had been absent;—during the first portion of that interval the establishment had been left to the care of menials, who bestowed indeed but little carefulness upon it; and for the latter portion of that period it had been held possession of by the Earl of Douglas, who though he collected the revenues of the estate, had chosen not to disburse any money upon improvements, inasmuch as he was not certain in respect to the tenure of that possession. Therefore many of the apartments were scarcely habitable at all; and even the best of those which were considered to be in good order, were (with two or three exceptions) in a condition but little consistent with decent appearance or comfort. Still there were two or three apartments which presented a better aspect than the rest; and these, as the reader may imagine, were occupied by the present lord of the castle.

This was the Black Douglas, who had retired to Hermitage, as the reader has already seen, immediately after his defeat by Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan in the lists at Roslin. The Earl had vowed to maintain possession of the Castle of Hermitage, even though King David himself should come against it with his army; and so far as the fierce Earl himself was concerned, he was quite capable of setting the King or any other authority on earth at defiance. But he was not so certain of being supported in his daring designs and bold usurpations by his own Border-retainers; and therefore, to guard against any emergency arising from the King’s intervention, he had thought to bring the whole matter to a crisis favourable to himself by seizing upon the person of the Earl of Caithness. What his other designs were, in respect to Albertina, the reader has already learnt through the medium of the revelations made by Father Julius; for those revelations were strictly consistent with the actual truth.



It was about eleven in the forenoon, on the day following that of which we were speaking in the preceding chapter; and glorious shone the refulgent sun upon the Border scenery whereof Hermitage Castle was so conspicuous an object. There were many forms moving to and fro upon the castle-ramparts; for the fortalice was kept in the most rigorous state of defence. But if we peep into the first of a spacious suite of apartments inside the Donjon, we shall find the Earl of Douglas pacing to and fro in a somewhat agitated manner; while Magnus Balveny stood in a respectful attitude near the table. The Earl was partially clad in his armour; and the remainder was close at hand, ready to be assumed at a moment's warning in case of any emergency arising. He had completely recovered from the effects of the injuries sustained in the lists of Roslin; but ever since that discomfiture his temper had grown more hasty, his language more peremptory and trenchant, his humour more petulant and impatient. Woe to the unhappy wight who should give offence to the Black Douglas while he was in such a mood as this!

"But if the scheme has not failed," exclaimed the Earl, in answer to some encouraging assurance which Magnus Balveny had ventured to throw out at hazard, "why do we hear naught of the party? No tidings come! no messenger arrives!"

"I feel confident, my lord," said Balveny, "that Father Julius and his men are waiting their opportunity. They know well where to hide themselves in one of the caverns of the Glen——"

"Tush, man!" exclaimed the Earl; "they are not playing at hide and seek all this time! Rest assured that they are not! I tell you that I have a presentiment of some mishap! The day before yesterday Lord Caithness is brought safely hither—but all yesterday elapses, and as much of this morning as is already gone, and still we hear naught of the Lady Albertina—no tidings come from Father Julius——"

"Even supposing, my lord," said Magnus Balveny, "that Father Julius should fail in the enterprise entrusted to him,—still, gracious master of mine, you have the Earl of Caithness a prisoner here——"

"And have I not already told you," exclaimed the Black Douglas, stopping short and bending his fierce looks upon Balveny, "that the Earl of Caithness proves deaf alike to threats and to amicable proposals?"

"Aye, my lord," interjected Magnus; "the Earl bore it with a high hand when in your lordship's presence yesterday—and again this morning; but his prisonage has been of too brief a duration to make him feel it. But by the measures which your lordship has just adopted——"

"By St. Bride of Bothwell! if that course bring not the Earl to his senses," exclaimed the Black Douglas, "nothing will! The same deep dungeon where 'tis said that Sir Alexander Ramsay perished by starvation—the same hopeless captivity—the same despair to supervene—aye, and perhaps——"

At this moment the sound of a bugle-horn, blown upon the ramparts of the castle, reached the ears of the Earl of Douglas and Magnus Balveny; and almost immediately afterwards a Borderer came rushing into the apartment, with the intelligence that a body of armed men had just been discerned advancing along the heights, in a northern direction.

"Ah! say you so?" exclaimed the Douglas: "for I judge by your speech and manner, that it is not a party of my own troops whom you have thus descried. We will away to the castle-wall!"

The Earl of Douglas put on his casque, grasped

his huge sword, and belted it to his waist. As he issued forth from the apartment, his steel boots rang upon the stone pavement of the passage; and the sounds seemed to have excited the interest or the curiosity of some occupant of a neighbouring apartment. For a door was opened precisely opposite to the room where the Black Douglas had just issued forth: and a female countenance of remarkable beauty peeped forward. With an expression of mingled tenderness and apprehension upon that lovely face, its owner said, "What portends, my lord, that bugle-note sounded upon the walls?"

"That an armed force is approaching, Elvira," responded the Black Douglas,—"but whether hostile or friendly, we as yet know not. 'Twere better however to make up your mind, Elvira, at once that 'tis a hostile force, and that there will be hot work here within a few hours; for the stakes I have lately played are calculated to make many foes!"

There was a grim fierceness in the look of the Black Douglas as he thus spoke: but as his countenance softened somewhat, he said in a voice which was comparatively mild, even if not tender, "Remain tranquil where you are, dearest Elvira; and fear not that the foe shall penetrate into your bower while the Douglas can wield his good falchion!"

The Earl passed on; and that beautiful countenance, which was melting and soft in its expression so long as his gaze lingered on it, became all in a moment altered; and the bitterest hatred, the keenest malignity, the darkest vindictiveness were combined in the terrible look which the superbly handsome eyes sent flashing after the nobleman. Magnus Balveny now made his appearance in the passage; and Elvira instantaneously withdrawing her countenance, closed the door of the room from which she had thus looked forth.

The Earl of Douglas descended into the courtyard, where numerous warriors were assembled. But there was a general rush towards the walls in consequence of the warning signal which the bugle-note had blown. There were twelve belted knights doing feudal service at Hermitage Castle; and they commanded the several divisions of the garrison, which consisted of three hundred spearmen and a hundred warriors who could either ply the cross-bow or wield the battle-axe.

On ascending to the outer wall—attended by several pages and squires who were ever on the alert to watch the movements of their dreaded Earl and pay their attentions accordingly—he discerned the body of armed men approaching from a distance. The number might soon be tolerably well estimated at between two and three hundred: the banner of Roslin was descried as a breeze blew it forth from the banner-staff to which it had sluggishly hung; and thus there could be no doubt as to who the party were.

"Behold ye not, Magnus," demanded the Earl, "two chiefs in front, each clad in complete armour? By St. Bride! one of the two—he who rides upon the left hand—is the stripling who by some false and foul means, doubtless of magic and glamour, gained an advantage over me in the lists!"

"True, my lord:—that is Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan in the dark armour and with the crimson plumes: the other——"

"The other is Sir Casimir D'Este," exclaimed the Black Douglas. "S'death! 'tis well that he again mixes himself up in the affairs where the Douglas is concerned!—for this time, by St. Bride of Bothwell! there shall be condign vengeance on our foes—and one and all shall rue the hour when they came to beard the lion in his den!"

"No doubt, my lord. And if that be the extent of their force," continued Magnus Balveny, "their own conceit must be mightily overweening, or they must have but a small idea of the number of stalwart men who form the garrison of Hermitage. But Ah!"

"What see you, Magnus?" demanded the Earl. "What! is it possible? the pennon of a pursuivant? No! my eyes deceive me! The King would not dare—"

"My lord," said Magnus impressively, "the pennon of a royal pursuivant is floating yonder! I presume there must be a parley?"

The Black Douglas bit his lip, while his dark eyes expressed ferocious rage, as he muttered to himself, "By heaven! if the King has dared to take the part of my foes—"

"Perhaps, my lord," interjected Magnus Balveny, "his Majesty may have sent such a conciliatory message as the most powerful of Scottish Earls may listen to without detriment to his own honour and dignity?"

"It may be so, worthy Magnus," exclaimed the Earl. "At all events we will hear what the pursuivant may have to address unto us."

While this colloquy was taking place, the party commanded by Sir Casimir D'Este and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, had halted at a distance which may be described as being just beyond the range of the garrison's missiles. Stephen Cochrane then waved his lance, to which the triangular pennon of a pursuivant was attached; and this was a signal to demand a parley. It was answered by a particular note blown by a clarion on the castle wall, and which conveyed an affirmative. Cochrane then rode forward between Sir Casimir D'Este and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan: but the bulk of the Roslin forces remained upon the spot where the halt had been made. Keeping clear of the morass, the pursuivant and the two knights proceeded in the direction of the causeway, until the vicinage of the raised drawbridge was reached. There they halted; and the Earl of Douglas shouted from the battlements over the gateway, "Speak, Sir Pursuivant! What message bearest thou from the King? Still, sure am I that it can be naught but a gracious one which the royal David thus transmits unto the Douglas!"

"Listen, my lord," exclaimed Stephen Cochrane, raising his voice to the highest pitch; "and listen likewise, all ye whom these presents may concern! In the first place I demand that the person of the Earl of Caithness be delivered up to me, unhurt and uninjured, scathless and unharmed: and in default of prompt compliance with that requisition—"

"Ah, knave," vociferated the Douglas, "wouldst thou dare threaten one who has the power and the will likewise, to inflict a signal chastisement for thine insolence?"

"My lord," rejoined the pursuivant, "remember that I am not speaking for myself, but that 'tis the majesty of Scotland now addressing thee by means of my voice. Therefore, in default of compliance with the demand which has just been made, I, Stephen Cochrane, making proclamation on behalf of his Highness David of Scotland, do hereby fulminate pains and penalties—"

"By the shades of my ancestors," vociferated the Black Douglas, "this speech shall not be completed in my hearing! Depart! retire! or by St. Bride, the bended bows of my bill-men shall send bolts and shafts—"

"Vile peer! infamous in every respect!" exclaimed Sir Casimir D'Este. "You even threaten me who approaches you with all a herald's sanctity!"

"Ah, Sir Casimir D'Este!" thundered forth the

Black Earl: "you and I have yet to cross weapons; and the time approaches when mine shall teach thee that 'twere better to make a friend than an enemy of the Douglas!"—and as he thus spoke he in his rage leaned so far over the battlements that it was almost a wonder the weight of his massive armour did not precipitate him completely down into the moat.

"Boast not, my Lord Earl!" said Sir Casimir D'Este, with mingled scorn and contempt; "for even if I were to sink vanquished beneath the valour of your arm, here is one who has already proven his ability to chastise the Douglas!"

Sir Casimir D'Este pointed to his young friend Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan as he thus spoke; and the Black Earl became livid with rage at the bitter taunt that was thrown out.

"Bend your bows! shoot them down!" he thundered forth, gesticulating furiously at the same time. "Up with the portcullis! down with the drawbridge! rush after them! take them prisoners! Pursuivant or no pursuivant, by heaven! that knave shall hang upon the walls of Hermitage!"

At first, when this torrent of ejaculations was thrown forth, the bowmen stood irresolute; but when the Black Earl continued in that fierce, almost frantic style, those about him grew alarmed lest his wrath should fall upon themselves; and the keen eye of Sir Casimir D'Este discerned the true aspect of affairs. He saw that in another moment all the sanctity which ought to envelope a pursuivant's mission, would be set at naught and trampled upon by the fierce Douglas in his rage. An idea flashed through his mind; and no sooner had it sprung into existence, than it was destined for execution.

"Turn as if to fly," he said in rapid utterance to his two companions; "but fly not in reality!"

They all three wheeled their steeds about, as if for the purpose of making the best of their way back to their troops at a little distance: a flight of arrows hailed around them—up went the portcullis of Hermitage Castle—down fell the drawbridge with a tremendous din—and forth rushed a number of the fierce Borderers.

"Wheel about!" exclaimed Sir Casimir D'Este. "Oh, brave Fleming! After us, Cochrane!"—and the next instant the redoubtable Teutonic warrior had turned and plunged into the midst of the horde of fierce Borderers that came pouring over the drawbridge.

Sir Casimir knew that the troops of Roslin had by this time discerned evidences of hostility at the castle, and that they would be quickly upon the spot. Still it was a tremendous undertaking for three men to make head against comparatively vast numbers for the period of at least five minutes which must elapse ere the mounted portion of their friends could come to their succour. Yet such was nevertheless the object and intention entertained by Sir Casimir D'Este. Quick as the whirlwind he had wheeled his steed round—he had plunged into the midst of the enemy—he cut his terrific way to the drawbridge—and this position it was his object to keep, if possible. Indeed everything depended upon it!

Aby was he seconded by Fleming Fitz-Allan; while Stephen Cochrane performed his own part right manfully. Down fell the Borderers on either side; for the gleaming falchions of the three valorous assailants did terrible execution in the briefest possible space of time. But it was not to be supposed that a conflict so tremendously unequal could long be waged on such terms. Down fell Cochrane's horse, its rider falling with it: but quick as thought Sir Casimir and Sir Fleming are at hand to succour the pursuivant—and he rises to his feet! The next

moment our young hero's steed falls suddenly forward on its knees; and its rider succeeds in springing to the ground in time to save himself ere the wounded animal rolls heavily over on its side, and gasping, dies! At the same time Sir Casimir D'Este, perceiving the danger thus incurred by having a horse slain under its rider in the midst of a host ready to press on to take advantage of the occurrence, leaps from his own charger, and abandoning the animal, continues to hew for himself a pathway amidst the horde of fierce Borderers thronging upon the drawbridge.

The Earl of Douglas was for a moment literally stupefied with astonishment when he beheld Sir Casimir, Sir Fleming, and the pursuivant turn to make head against his soldiers. But he speedily shouted with exultation at the idea, which was indeed natural enough, that they must be assuredly immolated in a very few instants. No—nothing of the sort! They fought on—aye, and with a valour so desperate, with a prowess so extraordinary, that they kept their position on the drawbridge! Of the two hundred and fifty troops of Roslin, some sixty or seventy were mounted; these horsemen were now dashing towards the scene of strife, while their comrades on foot were likewise speeding in the same direction.

"By St. Bride!" exclaimed the Douglas, drawing his trenchant weapon from its sheath, "there shall be a speedy end put to this mad audacity!"—and descending from the rampart, he rushed forth from the castle-portals to plunge into the fight.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CONFLICT.

The reader will have comprehended that it was Sir Casimir D'Este's intention, if possible, to maintain his position on the drawbridge until succour should arrive. The moat fed from the river Hermitage, was broad and deep, and therefore constituted one of the principal defences of the castle. But now that the drawbridge was lowered, if Sir Casimir could only succeed in preventing the Borderers from raising it again, an enormous advantage would be gained to his own side. The Black Douglas, despite all his own natural daring and headstrong fearlessness, could not for a single instant have believed it possible that three warriors only would turn and make head against the numbers that were pouring forth upon them. Such however was the case; and as the reader has already seen, the Teutonic Knight, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, and Stephen Cochrane, deported themselves in a manner which at first astounded and then maddened the Black Earl.

For several minutes the unequal strife raged with astonishing fury on the causeway and the drawbridge; and the Borderers fell slain or wounded on all sides beneath the weapons of the three warriors. The bowmen on the castle walls dared not continue to shower down their missiles, for fear of doing more execution amongst their own comrades than they could inflict injury upon the three warriors. For these three men were completely sheathed in steel panoply from the crown of the head to the heel of the foot; and the first shower of arrows which hailed upon them at the moment of their pretended flight, glanced innocuously from off their armour. And on such good proof was this armour, that the blows now dealt upon it in the fierce medley produced but little effect. As the Borderers swarmed around Sir Casimir, Sir Fleming, and the pursuivant, many a

hand grasped a dagger and endeavoured to plunge the sharp-pointed weapon through the joints of the steel panoplies: but every time the intended blow failed. And thus the reader may comprehend how it was that three men were enabled, not merely to resist the attack of the eighty or a hundred who came swarming out against them, but likewise to make successful head against them—drive them back—and retain a position on the drawbridge.

The Earl of Douglas, furious at all that was thus progressing, suddenly rushed forth from the arched portal of Hermitage, with his mighty weapon in his hand. At this very moment the sixty or seventy horsemen belonging to the troops that had marched from Roslin, came thundering in full career along the causeway: but as they thus advanced, they were saluted by a tremendous storm of missiles from the castle wall. Their leader, instantaneously perceiving the aspect of affairs, gave the command to his troop to dismount: a few of the men remained to take charge of the steeds—the rest rushed forward on foot to share in the conflict upon the drawbridge. For a short interval they had to pass through the galling flight of missiles which was poured upon them; and several fell dead or severely wounded. But, nothing daunted, the bulk of the gallant little party pressed on: and that which was before a conflict most tremendously unequal, now became a battle upon far fairer terms. Meanwhile fresh troops kept pouring forth from the portals of the castle; while the main body of the little army of Roslin was from the other direction hastening to the scene of the strife.

The Earl of Douglas, on setting foot upon the drawbridge, called to his men to make way that he might cross weapons with Sir Casimir D'Este: but such were the powerful fluctuations of the battling crowd—such were the oscillations of the fermented mass—the human river heaving and tossing, as it were, on the bridge which lay across the natural tide that flowed beneath,—that even the herculean strength of the Black Douglas could not immediately succeed in forcing a way through the agitating multitude. At length Sir Casimir himself cleared the way towards the Black Earl; and their weapons crossed with a din which rang high above all the other sounds of battle.

"Surrender if thou would save thy life!" thundered forth the Black Douglas.

"Tis for thee to surrender, false Earl!" exclaimed the Teutonic Knight. "Thy King has outlawed thee!"

"I will have vengeance!" vociferated the Black Douglas: "and first upon thee!"

"All thy castles and estates are declared forfeit!" cried Sir Casimir; "and the law's ban is upon thee!"

"As my vengeance is upon thee!" retorted the Douglas.

The conflict experienced a pause all around those two formidable champions whose weapons were thus crossing, and who for the first few moments exchanged threats and taunts as well as blows. Their falchions clanged and clashed as mutually they struck shield or armour, or smote against each other; and there was a species of superstitious feeling on the part of many of the spectators that according to the issue of this combat would be the result of the general conflict itself, so that within a few minutes the fate of Hermitage must be decided. Even Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and the pursuivant desisted for a brief space from the work of onslaught and battle, to behold this passage-of-arms which constituted an episode of such startling interest.

At the instant when the Black Douglas had with

fierce exultation made the rejoinder that his vengeance was about to alight on Sir Casimir D'Este, his huge falchion was descending with all the force that his stalwart arm could communicate : but still more forceful was the dint imparted to the weapon of the Teutonic Knight—and still more stalwart was the arm of the latter. High into the air flew the Earl's falchion,—whirling round and round with a whistling sound, as it obeyed the tremendous impulse which had thus dashed it away from the hand that grasped it; and the next instant Sir Casimir D'Este hurled down his opponent by the power of his arm. The Earl, sheathed in his iron panoply, fell with a tremendous crash upon the drawbridge : in the twinkling of an eye Sir Casimir's foot was placed upon his breast—his sword-point was turned towards the barred vizor of his helmet—and his lips ejaculated the words, "Surrender, Lord Earl of Douglas! Surrender thyself and this castle—or I take thy life!"

But scarcely were the words spoken, when forth from the portals of Hermitage sprang the twelve belted Knights who were doing feudal service there beneath the banner of the Black Douglas. Twelve powerful warriors were they,—all clad in bright steel armour. They were about to rush forth to take their part in the medley at the very instant when the Earl and Sir Casimir had crossed their weapons : then, as there was a temporary pause around, those twelve Knights had likewise paused to witness the exciting spectacle of a single combat in the midst of a general strife. But the very moment that the Earl of Douglas fell beneath the more redoubtable arm of Sir Casimir, those twelve Knights vociferated as if with one voice, "To the rescue!"—and on they rushed. Then, as if by common consent, the entire battle itself was renewed on both sides.

So sudden was the tumultuous rush produced by this fresh appeal to arms, that even as the mightiest vessel yields to the current which abruptly seizes upon it, so was it in some sense with the brave Teutonic Knight. The human waves rolled around him—he was borne backward—and with a tremendous shout of triumph on the part of the Borderers, the prostrate form of the vanquished Douglas was lifted from the drawbridge by the foremost of the twelve Knights.

"Fleming, to my side!" shouted Sir Casimir : and again did his falchion begin to clear a desperate path before him.

The brave young Fitz-Allan was quickly by his friend's side. Stephen Cochrane and other leaders of the Roslin warriors were likewise ready for fresh feats of prowess ; and now came the crisis of the whole conflict. The Earl of Douglas had been borne off from the scene of his defeat, and in a state of unconsciousness carried back into the castle : but now the twelve Knights stood in a compact serried rank on the inner extremity of the drawbridge, determined to dispute the passage, and believing even that they might sweep away all before them. Deadly therefore was the conflict in which the belligerents closed again : fearful was the din of battle ; the clashing of weapons mingled with the fierce taunts that were given and retorted betwixt the combatants, the cries of the wounded, and the frequent heavy splashings in the moat as the dead or dying fell from the drawbridge. For several minutes it seemed as if the garrison must prevail in beating off the assailants—for the whole host of Borderers came pouring forth, forming so dense a mass under the archway that they pushed those who were foremost still farther forward, and rendered retreat next to impossible for them. It must also be borne in mind that though the side of the Borderers had already

sustained considerable loss, it still presented the immense odds of at least three hundred and fifty men against two hundred and fifty on the side of the retainers of Roslin.

"Beat them back from the drawbridge!" cried the foremost of the twelve Knights who fought on the side of Douglas : "beat them back, I say! and our task is ended!"

"No!—'tis thy life that is ended!" thundered Sir Casimir ; and down fell the Knight, his armour clashing against the drawbridge, and then the whole weight splashing with a heavy plunge into the moat.

"Vengeance for our fallen brother!" exclaimed the next Knight ; but another and another was sent after the first,—Sir Casimir's falchion dealing death with a rapidity that was almost as swiftly followed up by that of Fleming Fitz-Allan.

Indeed they fought with desperate valour ; for they knew how much was at stake. If only for an instant they were beaten back from the drawbridge, that drawbridge would be raised—the moat would suddenly yawn at their feet—the garrison would be take themselves to the ramparts—and the Roslin troops must have recourse to a regular siege to effect their aim. But if their position were maintained upon the bridge, it was like fighting a pitched battle upon a plain, the result of which would give all the desired fruits to the victors. Thus on the issue of the present strife the fate of Hermitage itself depended!

No wonder, therefore, that Sir Casimir and Sir Fleming exerted all their powers!—no wonder that the troops who fought under them caught no inconsiderable amount of their dauntless leaders' spirit! But well fought the Borderers likewise. Of the twelve Knights who led them on, seven had disappeared from the scene,—their life's blood being poured forth in the cause of the Douglas! It was now evident that the Borderers were wavering ; and Stephen Cochrane, observing that such was the fact, exclaimed, "Surrender at once! and in the royal name I promise ye your pardon!"

"Let us make terms from within!" shouted numerous voices.

There was then a general rush on the part of the Borderers through the entrance-way of the castle ; and as the hindmost cleared the threshold, the cry arose, "Down with the portcullis! down with it!"

The hands of the two warders instantaneously grasped the chains to let the portcullis fall : but with a lightning rapidity of movement Sir Casimir D'Este caught up a fragment of the broken rail of the drawbridge :—it was a piece of timber about six feet long and of considerable thickness, adequate therefore for the purpose which it was now to serve. In the twinkling of an eye the Teutonic Knight thrust it in an almost perpendicular position against one of the grooves in which the portcullis worked ; and scarcely had he done so, when down fell the ponderous iron grating. But the beam suddenly stopped it in its descent : the Borderers, with a yell of rage on beholding the incident, turned and made a rush towards the piece of timber to tear it away—but Sir Casimir's falchion played about it with the rapidity of a succession of lightning-flashes—the arms that grasped the timber and the hands that clutched it were cut off—and a harvest of the mutilated members was strown upon the ground. Fitz-Allan was quickly upon the spot—Cochrane likewise—with the trooping numbers of the Roslin warriors behind them ; and for a few minutes a desperate conflict was renewed in the entrance-way of Hermitage. But the battle here was only short, inasmuch as the Borderers had for some time past entertained the presentiment of defeat, and were

therefore dispirited by the presage; while the Roslin party on the other hand were proportionately inspired with hopefulness and with veritable success already achieved. The Borderers fled. Vainly did the surviving Knights and Magnus Balveny endeavour to rally them: a temporary stand was made at the portal of the inner rampart—but Sir Casimir D'Este threw the whole weight of his powerful form against the massive gate which there was an attempt to close—and then the Borderers rushed on in precipitate retreat towards the court-yard.

"Turn, my men! rally!" shouted Magnus Balveny. "Once more to the rescue!"

"Turn thou, then!" ejaculated a voice close behind Balveny: and as he abruptly faced about, he found himself confronted by young Malcolm Seton.

"Ah!" said Balveny, with a fierce look, "do you seek a repetition of the discomfiture you experienced in the lists at Roslin!"

"I am here to avenge that discomfiture!" exclaimed Seton. "Fight, if you be a man;—or surrender!"

"Surrender, if faith!" cried Balveny scornfully: and his weapon, ringing through the air, seemed for a moment to threaten the youth with utter annihilation.

But such was not the result: for Malcolm Seton steadily received the blow upon his sword; and then becoming the assailant, he with desperate fury dealt Magnus blow upon blow until that fierce Borderer fell weltering in his blood at the youthful victor's feet.

"My good name is redeemed!" cried Seton exultingly, while his countenance was animated with the radiance of heroic feeling.

At the same time the last effort of resistance on the part of the Borderers was beaten down by the Roslin troops; and in young Seton's ear resounded the following words, spoken by the Teutonic Knight,—"Bravely done, Sir Page! Thou hast thy portion of the laurels of this day!"

"Yes—'twas well done, my faithful Seton!" exclaimed Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, grasping with his gauntleted hand that of the young page.

"Make proclamation, Sir Pursuivant, according as I have suggested!" now said Sir Casimir to Stephen Cochrane, to whom he had just before hastily whispered his instructions.

"Hearken, all ye whom these presents may concern!" said the Royal Pursuivant, mounting on some elevation of masonry in the court-yard, so as to be plainly heard by all whose ears he wished his voice to reach.

The Roslin troops were all now drawn up on one side,—having amongst them the numerous prisoners they had taken. On the other side was the remnant of the garrison, looking sadly dejected, and evidently ready for a surrender. Magnus Balveny had been borne away severely wounded: the five Knights who of the twelve survived, had already sheathed their swords as an indication that they knew the uselessness of attempting further defence, and that they therefore threw themselves upon the mercy of the conquerors.

"By virtue of the decree of pains and penalties," resumed Stephen Cochrane, thus making his proclamation, "it were lawful for us to treat ye all as traitors against the King's majesty. But forasmuch as ye have displayed so much noble courage in the conflict of this day, we feel assured that the King were loath for such brave men to be too rigorously chastened. Therefore I, Stephen Cochrane—speaking in the King's name, as well as by consent and counsel of the worshipful Knights Sir Casimir D'Este and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan—do hereby make proclamation to the effect that full pardon

and grace shall be at once accorded to those who immediately retire to their own homes, vowing to acknowledge as Lord of Hermitage none other but him who shall in due time publish his rights and titles to the estates of Liddesdale and Teviotdale. Let those who are prepared to avail themselves of the royal mercy, as it is now proclaimed, defile forth from this fortalice, making the sign of the cross in attestation of the sincerity with which the conditional vow will be maintained!"

"Sir Casimir D'Este—and you also, brave Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan," said one of the five surviving Knights on the Douglas side, "ye have dealt most honourably towards us by suffering your Royal Pursuivant to pay a tribute to the devotion with which we fought for our chief the Lord of Douglas. We are conquered: we submit to our destiny—and we gratefully accept the assurance of the royal mercy. Furthermore we vow to recognise henceforth as Lord of Hermitage that chief who shall show the best claim upon our allegiance."

Thus spoke the senior warrior of the party; and the looks of all the rest of the Douglas retainers assembled there, indicated approval of the sentiments thus enunciated. Sir Casimir D'Este bowed in acknowledgment of that speech; and then turning to Stephen Cochrane, he said, "Tarry you here, Sir Pursuivant—and see that the troops of the garrison defile past, while Sir Fleming and myself hasten to liberate the noble Earl of Caithness, and likewise to dictate terms to the Earl of Douglas."

Sir Casimir issued a few hurried and requisite instructions to the victorious troops of Roslin, who regarded him as their principal leader; and they forthwith began to post themselves in such a manner about the fortalice as to guard against any sudden surprise on the part of the garrison if the latter should be disposed to make such an attempt instead of quietly defiling forth from the portals. But there was no danger on this point, though the precaution was a sage one.

Sir Casimir and Sir Fleming inquired the way to the apartments occupied by the Earl of Douglas; and as they ascended the stone staircase of the Donjon, our young hero exclaimed with a heart full of joyous emotion, "Oh, my excellent friend! what bliss, what happiness to think victory hath thus smiled upon us, and that we are about to give freedom to the Earl of Caithness!"

"Yes, Fleming," responded Sir Casimir, bending upon the youthful Knight a look of affectionate admiration: "and now the lordly Castle of Hermitage is your own—and full soon shall the name of Fitz-Allan be proclaimed as that of its possessor!"

Our hero was on the point of giving utterance to some expression of joyous exultation, when a door suddenly opened upon a landing; and a lady of exceedingly handsome countenance, and whose age might be about four or five and twenty, made her appearance. Both the Knights were taken somewhat by surprise—for they expected not to encounter any lady of such distinguished mien and interesting look within those walls. It however almost immediately struck Sir Casimir that this must be the mistress of the Earl of Douglas; for he knew that the nobleman had neither wife nor daughter living. He therefore said, "As I presume, fair one, that you are in all the secrets of the Black Douglas, you will be pleased to conduct us at once to wheresoever we may find our noble friend the Earl of Caithness."

"Ah! then ye are the victors?" said Elvira, whatsoever uncertainty and suspense she had previously entertained on the point being now cleared up; "and Hermitage is in your hands? I thank

God that it is so!—for there will doubtless be vengeance now on him who bears the loathed, the hideous, the hated name of Douglas!"

Both Sir Casimir and Sir Fleming were astonished at the bitter burning words of hatred which had just flowed from her lips, fierce and hissing as blood-drops themselves might start away from the terrible impress of a searing-iron: and we should observe that the naturally handsome countenance of Elvira suddenly seemed to have all the wickedness of a fiend depicted in its looks as she spoke those words.

"Who are you, lady?" inquired Sir Casimir.

"I am one who has suffered!" answered Elvira: "yes—I have suffered the mightiest wrongs——"

"If we can redress them, lady," interrupted Sir Casimir, "such shall assuredly be our task. But for the present we have the most sacred of all duties to perform——"

"Yes!—tell us, I beseech you," cried Fitz-Allan, "where is the Earl of Caithness?"

"Follow me," said Elvira.

She conducted the two Knights to an adjoining apartment, where suits of armour were suspended to the walls, and pieces of martial panoplies were scattered about. There were refreshments upon a table; and likewise on that table there was a helmet, which the two Knights at once recognised as the one the Black Douglas had worn during the recent conflict.

"We not merely seek our friend the Earl of Caithness," said Sir Casimir; "but we likewise require to know where is our enemy the Earl of Douglas."

"First, in reference to the Earl of Caithness," responded Elvira, "he is in a dungeon—a dungeon already memorable on account of an appalling crime——"

"A dungeon?" shudderingly exclaimed Fleming. "Oh, my benefactor! But let us hasten to liberate him!"

"Lady," said Sir Casimir, in a commanding tone—for he scarcely knew what to think of her,— "without further parley show us the way to that dungeon!"

"It is here," said Elvira: and stooping down, she hastily drew aside a piece of carpet upon the floor—her taper finger was then thrust into an iron ring which had thus become revealed—and she lifted a trap-door, disclosing a flight of stone steps leading down into utter darkness.

An ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of Fleming Fitz-Allan: but Sir Casimir D'Este, with a mind full of suspicion in respect to Elvira, pointed towards the trap-door, as he demanded sternly, "Would you have us descend into the bowels of the earth to seek our friend the Earl of Caithness?"

"Ah! you mistrust me?" exclaimed Elvira. "And no wonder! for everything should be looked upon with suspicion in this frightful place! It is a place of infamy, of crime, and of horror; and the taint is upon all who either willingly or perforce dwell within its walls! Yet am I speaking truth fully to ye both, Sir Knights!—and Oh, believe me!—and likewise shield me from the Black Douglas!"

Elvira knelt before Sir Casimir D'Este as she thus spoke; and there was an air of such sincerity in the looks which were upturned towards him, that he said, "Rise, lady—and pardon me if for a moment I have wronged you with my suspicions! Perhaps, had you at once told us who you really are—But no matter! You say that the Earl of Caithness languishes in a dungeon here beneath? I will therefore descend to his deliverance. Sir

Fleming, tarry you here with the lady; and I need not add——"

"Still suspicious! still mistrustful!" exclaimed Elvira. "And no wonder! no wonder! But look you here!—and behold a proof of my sincerity in advocating your cause, and in hating the Douglas! He was brought hither insensible—but soon he began to recover—I resolved that his hand should not again this day grasp a weapon in defence of Hermitage—and behold! the wine that I gave him from yon tiagon was powerfully drugged—he sleeps here—and if he escape *your* vengeance, he shall not escape *mine*!"

As she thus spoke, Elvira hastened to draw back a curtain which was suspended by rings to an iron rod; and in a large recess, or alcove, which the drawn drapery thus revealed, the Black Douglas was seen sleeping upon a couch. He was partially divested of his armour: his countenance had a grim expression—his breathing was deep and heavy—but his form was entirely motionless save in respect to the heaving of his chest.

"There is the key which opens the dungeon where your friend the Earl of Caithness is confined:"—and Elvira pointed to the key which was suspended to the Black Earl's sword-belt. "Now do you believe that I am sincere? or do you anticipate treachery if you descend to that dark and terrible subterranean? Shall I tell you wherefore I hate and abhor the name of Douglas, no matter by whom borne?—shall I tell you wherefore I hate and abhor *this* Douglas so deeply and so fearfully? In respect to the first it is because—in the dark underground dungeon where your friend now sojourns the spirit of a sire has for long years hovered, calling up from that depth for vengeance——"

"Just heaven! what mean you?" cried Fleming Fitz-Allan, fearfully interested in what he now heard.

"What mean you?" also asked Sir Casimir, though perhaps in a less excited manner than that in which his youthful companion had put a precisely similar question.

It was a strange wild look which Elvira fixed upon the two Knights—a look denoting terrible things; and it was in a tone so gloomy and sombre that it seemed wonderful how her naturally musical voice could change to such a note, that she said, "Nineteen years and upwards have elapsed since my father was murdered beneath this roof, by the Knight of Liddesdale!"

"Your father?" ejaculated both the Knights, as if speaking in the same breath. "Then you, lady—you——"

"I am Elvira Ramsay," she answered, her look and voice now losing alike their fierceness and their sombreness, and sinking into the profoundest sadness. "I am Elvira Ramsay," she repeated,— "the daughter of the murdered Sir Alexander!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARGARET AND THE ROYAL PAGE.

AWAY went messengers amidst the picturesque and romantic scenery of Liddesdale and Teviotdale: away they sped through the county of Roxburgh;—and one branched off to the Abbey of Melrose to bear unto Father Benedictus a despatch from Sir Casimir D'Este, communicating to him all that had occurred on the banks of the Hermitage. Another messenger—and this was young Seton—proceeded in a different direction; and in a brief space he fell in with the Earl of Bassentyne's re-

tainers—three hundred stalwart men in all, and led by the young nobleman in person. To him did Seton verbally communicate the fugitives which have just been detailed; and thus Roland was enabled to lead back his retainers to his own domain, their services being no longer needed by his friends.

A third messenger was in the meanwhile making the best of his way to Roslin Castle; and this was Stephen Cochrane. It was in the evening of the same day on which those memorable deeds had occurred on the bank of the Hermitage, that the pursuivant was descried by the watchers on the summit of the Donjon. He was descending into the glen: he rode as fast as the declivitous path and the jaded condition of his steed would permit: he was evidently the bearer of important tidings. As he neared the stone bridge, he waved his lance so that the pennon fluttered to and fro at the point, and the signal was received as one of joy and triumph. The portcullis was raised—the drawbridge was lowered: there was a rush of the inmates of the castle across the stone bridge to hear the tidings that had to be imparted—and these soon flew like wildfire to every nook and corner of the fortalice.

Everything had succeeded; and this success was in all respects brilliant! A tremendous battle had been fought at the very gates of Hermitage! The castle was stormed and taken possession of: the garrison had been suffered on certain conditions to depart! The Earl of Caithness was free and happy! The Earl of Douglas, having resigned all claims to the estates of his deceased kinsman the Knight of Liddesdale—and having entered into other engagements of an amicable character—had been forgiven for his vile conduct and suffered to depart. But in the Castle of Hermitage a lady was found, whose existence seemed to have been only known unto a few; and this lady was none other than the daughter of the murdered Sir Alexander Ramsay! Great wrongs had she to complain of against the present Earl of Douglas on her own personal account, as well as against the memory of the deceased Knight of Liddesdale on her murdered father's account: but as her mind was for the present exceedingly unsettled, and it was absolutely necessary to provide her with an immediate asylum—for Hermitage was hateful to her—she had availed herself of the hospitality of the nuns of St. Magdalen's Convent, situated at a distance of only a few miles from Hermitage.

Such were the various details of intelligence which the pursuivant Stephen Cochrane brought to Roslin. Who can depict the joy and delight which were experienced by Albertina and Margaret, when they heard of the success of the expedition? They listened with a sensation of admiring awe as Cochrane told them of the more than Roman valour of Sir Casimir D'Este; but their hearts thrilled as they heard of the prowess displayed by Fleming Fitz-Allan: for now Albertina was drinking in the eulogies bestowed upon her lover, and Margaret those which were so well merited by her brother!

"And when shall I embrace my father?" asked Albertina, her heart palpitating with filial emotions.

"The Earl of Caithness," replied the pursuivant, "will set out to-morrow morning, in company with Sir Casimir D'Este, on his return to Roslin. Therefore, lady, in the middle of the day may you hope to welcome the presence of your sire."

"And my brother?" said Margaret,—"you speak not of the return of Sir Fleming?"

"It is arranged that your gallant brother Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan shall remain at Hermitage Castle to assert his right and title unto the possession

thereof,—and which right and title have, as I ere now stated, been formally recognised by the Earl of Douglas. This is the sum and substance of the various messages with which I was charged; and as you may suppose, fair ladies, I have tarried not in my way through the broad counties of Roxburgh, Selkirk, and Peebles, until my horse's hoofs aroused the echoes of Roslin Glen and rang upon the pavement of the stone bridge."

"You are the bearer of joyous tidings, good Master Cochrane!" said Albertina; "and let this be the proof and guerdon of my gratitude!"

Thus speaking, the young lady placed a heavy purse in Stephen Cochrane's hand; and he received the gift with suitable acknowledgments.

"Accept this from me, good Master Cochrane," said Margaret, "in return for the joyous intelligence with which you have cheered our hearts, and likewise for the eulogies that you bestowed upon the chivalrous bearing of my beloved brother in the dread conflict."

It was a golden chain which Margaret bestowed upon Cochrane—for this was a gift which according to the custom of that age might be well and properly accorded under existing circumstances. There was however a certain significance, mingling with embarrassment, in Margaret's look and manner; and Cochrane said to himself, as he bowed in respectful acknowledgment of the gift, "Ah! she is remunerating me for keeping her secret of yesterday afternoon, as much as for the happy intelligence which I have brought this evening!"

He retired from the apartment where he had been admitted to an audience of the two young ladies; and the moment they were alone together, Albertina threw herself into Margaret's arms, exclaiming, "Oh, the happiness which now fills my heart! Let us, my dearest friend, mingle and interchange our congratulations!"

Albertina wept in the melting tenderness of her emotions: but Margaret's bosom swelled with the proudest exultation, as she thought to herself, "All the evidences of prosperity are coming thickly upon us! My brother is now Lord of Teviotdale and Liddesdale; and he treats in the halls of his own castle! And I—I—Oh! if my game be well played, and if there be no more such unguarded conduct nor foolish oversight as that in which I was yesterday surprised by Cochrane,—yes, my destiny may likewise become a brilliant one!"

Thus thought Margaret within her own bosom:—thus did her soul's secret voice raise itself in exulting anticipation: but still in her calmer moments she could have wished that the difficulty of the game she was playing had not given rise to an occurrence that placed her in the power of Stephen Cochrane. She was resolved to seek an interview with this individual, in order that she might ascertain why he declared himself to be her friend, and also that she might judge in which channel his selfishness flowed; because not for a single instant could she conceive that he was disinterested in the proffer of such friendship, or simply magnanimous in throwing a veil over his knowledge of her perfidious double-dealing.

Accordingly, in the forenoon of the following day—while Albertina was engaged with Hepburn the steward and Redburn the lieutenant, in devising a suitable means to denote a fervid welcome on the return of her father, Sir Casimir D'Este, and the brave warriors who had captured the fortalice of Hermitage—Margaret Fitz-Allan took an opportunity to make a sign for Stephen Cochrane to follow her to the armoury of the castle. There she knew that without the danger of interruption might they converse; and it was with a demeanour of the ut-



most respect that the royal page at once obeyed the signalled mandate of the damsel.

"Master Cochrane," she said, when they were thus alone together—and she endeavoured to speak with as much firmness, composure, and self-possession as possible—"I thought that for certain reasons you might desire private speech of me; and I have accordingly sought the present occasion for a conference."

"Yes, lady," answered Cochrane; "it is indeed of importance that we should have private speech together. I will even say that we should understand each other!"

A blush flitted on Margaret's countenance: she felt that Cochrane was already asserting over her the power which he possessed. But she dared not display indignation: it was vitally important that this man should be conciliated; and she therefore said, "Your conduct has been most friendly unto me, Master Cochrane; and whatever my future fortunes may be, I shall hold myself ever bounden towards you in a debt of gratitude."

"Tis well, lady, to give me this assurance," said Cochrane: then fixing his gaze significantly upon her, and yet with an air of respect, he asked, "To what height does your ambition soar?"

"To put such an inquiry, Master Cochrane," responded Margaret proudly, "is to imply the belief on your part that you deem it were possible for me to aspire only to that midway point which has shame associated with it; whereas—"

"Pardon me, lady," said the royal page, with a profound bow: "I see that you aspire to the very summit of the eminence! In a word, you would fain be Queen of Scotland!"

The very manner in which Stephen Cochrane gave utterance to this concluding sentence showed that he regarded the fact itself to be entirely within the bounds of probability:—and who could better judge of what the King might do than his own most confidential servitor? The flash of joyous hope appeared upon Margaret's countenance—her whole frame trembled—and her voice vibrated as she said, "In all honour will I be everything to the King, your royal master: but in shame will I be nothing unto him! Tell me, Stephen Cochrane—do I rightly read the sentiments which your mind cherishes? You can help me to a throne; and I can raise you up from a comparatively humble position to a proud and lofty one? Is it thus that we are to understand each other?"

"It is thus," rejoined the page, "that we are to understand each other, most gracious lady."

"Ah! it is as if I were already a Sovereign that you are addressing me!" said Margaret, her heart glowing and every vein tingling with pride and triumph as she thought of how the highest titles and most swelling sounds would soon flow upon her ears from the tongues of courtiers.

"If I addressed you as though you were already a Queen," rejoined Cochrane, "it was because I knew full well that it now rests with yourself how soon this hand of yours be indissolubly united to that of the royal David. You have agreed to the solemnization of secret nuptials?"

"I have," replied Margaret; "but I have stipulated that all the circumstances shall be so unmistakably genuine—so unquestionably straightforward—"

"Trust to me, lady, to give you the most convincing proofs of the perfect regularity, legality, and validity of the ceremony. Then, when once the nuptial knot is tied, it will rest with yourself—or rather I should say between yourself and your royal husband, to decide for how long a period the marriage is to be kept secret. That will be a matter in

which I can have no interference, and in which indeed I have no interest one way or another. So far as I am concerned I pledge myself that the bonds shall be tied as firmly as priestly blessing can possibly fasten the knot; and it only remains for you to declare when this ceremony shall take place?"

"Oh! is it possible that you have the power thus to address me?" asked Margaret, trembling all over: "is it possible that you have your royal master's gracious authority for such flattering speech as this?"

"It were worse than child's folly," exclaimed Cochrane, "if I were to promise aught that I cannot perform. Understand me well, lady! It is in my power to ruin you with the King for ever—or on the other hand to make you Queen of Scotland! Yes—I, the humble palace-page, have that power; and the alternatives betwixt which your destiny hovers, lady, are as a pair of scales which I hold in my hand!"

"I know that I am at your mercy in one sense," said Margaret, deprecatingly and tremulously; "and this is that you have the power to ruin me! But whether on the other hand you have the power to achieve the greatness of my fortune, and to make me Queen of Scotland—"

"Lady, I have that power!" exclaimed the royal page emphatically: "I swear to you that I have! But oaths are nothing: you may look upon them as the weak props set up to support idle vaunts. Let me be judged by deeds. Say but the word, lady, and this very evening ere the midnight bell shall have tolled, that hand of yours shall be clasped as a bride's in the hand of King David as a bridegroom!"

Margaret had from the first comprehended full well that Stephen Cochrane was appointed by the King to act as an intermediary between them: but she did not conceive that he had the power to bring matters to so speedy and decisive an issue as this. The reader has also seen that Margaret had clung to the loftiest hopes and had calculated what might be the brilliant results of judiciously playing the cards which circumstances had placed in her hands: but still, when she was now given to understand that these hopes were on the very point of realization—that in a few brief hours they might be fulfilled, and that her glorious destiny might be accomplished ere the sun of another day rose upon the world—all seemed too magnificent to be realized—a vision too splendid and beautiful to last! She almost mistrusted the propitious smiles of her own fortunes; and strong-minded though she were, yet she felt a faintness coming over her as she was thus suspended dizzily betwixt the towering eminence to which she was bidden to look up as her destination, and the fearful abyss of her mistrust and misgiving which yawned far down below!

"Lady," said Stephen Cochrane, perceiving how she was agitated by her emotions, "take courage—and mistrust not your fortunes! The star of your destiny is brilliantly in the ascendant; and the proofs shall not be wanting! Tell me that I am to act on your behalf; and this night, at eleven o'clock—yes, and beneath this very roof—here where we now stand—shall Scotland's monarch kneel at your feet, offer you the homage of his heart, and beseech the boon of your hand! And in the neighbouring oratorio the tapers shall be lighted on the altar—the priest shall be in readiness—"

"What, Cochrane," faltered Margaret, scarcely able to believe her own ears,— "all this shall happen during the night that is to succeed the present day—and before another sun shall rise from the eastern horizon—"

"All, all shall be accomplished!" replied the royal page; "and you shall be Queen of Scotland!"

It was with sensations and emotions of the wildest and dizziest joy that Margaret murmured the words, "I consent!"

Then she felt as if she could almost weep—or as if by some passionate means or another she *must* find a vent for her unnaturally excited feelings. But she controlled herself by dint of the most powerful effort; and a brief pause having elapsed, Cochrane said, "Now, lady, you must bethink yourself how to deal with the young Earl of Bassentyne."

"Ah!" ejaculated Margaret: and the carnation spread vividly over her countenance.

"The Earl has placed a ring upon your finger, lady," said Cochrane; "and your's glitters upon his own finger in return! This must not be. I need not tell you, lady —"

"No, no—tell me nothing in reference to this, good Cochrane!—for I know 'tis a foul outrage against the image of the King; and I blush—I am humiliated—I cannot look you in the face!"

"Lady," interrupted Cochrane, "your position is embarrassing—but it is not inextricable; and I beseech you to leave me to smooth down this difficulty before you. Pen a line to Roland of Bassentyne, to the effect that you have misunderstood the feelings of your heart, and that in hastily pledging your vows, you neither took a step which could eventually consolidate his happiness nor ensure your own. Return him the ring which he placed upon your finger; and beseech him to send back the ring which he received in exchange. I will undertake that this mission shall be conducted with all possible secrecy and suitable delicacy."

Margaret hesitated to comply with this proposition; for she at once saw that by accepting it she would be resigning the Earl ere she had finally secured the King; and this was contrary to the whole tenour of the policy which she had been pursuing. Besides, to entrust Cochrane with such a mission seemed indelicate in her eyes, and might lead the Earl of Bassentyne to think strangely of her.

"You hesitate, lady," said Cochrane; "and yet time is precious—for I am about to despatch a messenger to the King. How can I bid his Majesty come hither to woo Margaret Fitz-Allan as his bride while upon her finger she wears the betrothal ring of another suitor? And then too, Roland of Bassentyne may himself be returning to Roslin Castle—and I must adopt measures to prevent him!"

"What measures?" inquired Margaret, nervously and anxiously; for the process of extricating herself from the web of difficulties which her own duplicity had woven, was a painful one.

"No matter what measures!" rejoined Cochrane. "Rest assured, lady, that they shall be discreetly taken. I again tell you that precious time is slipping away! Trust me entirely—or trust me not at all! Do not deal towards me with the mental parsimony of half-confidence! You *must* see that I am your friend; for while with a breath I could destroy you, I am nevertheless on the other hand helping you to a crown!"

Margaret felt that she was already so completely in Cochrane's power that if he desired or designed to deal wickedly with her he had ample means for the exercise of his perfidy or malignity; so that she could not by any fresh act make her position worse. At the same time her good sense showed her how entirely it was to Cochrane's interest to befriend her, to serve her faithfully, and to help her to ascend that throne from which she could shower remunerative gifts upon him. Her mind was therefore speedily made up how to act.

Seating herself at a table, where there were writing materials—for Redman the lieutenant kept his account-books in the armoury—Margaret Fitz-Allan penned a brief billet to Roland of Bassentyne. What its contents were, we need not detail on the present occasion: suffice it to say that she displayed the note to the eyes of Stephen Cochrane, and he approved of the terms in which it was couched. She then took from her finger the ring which the unfortunate Roland had so recently placed thereon; and she enclosed it in the letter, which she duly sealed and fastened with a silken string. This packet she handed to Cochrane,—at the same time asking in a tremulous voice, "But if the Earl of Bassentyne should chance to return to the castle speedily—ere you have had leisure to communicate with him —"

"Fear nothing!—leave everything to me, lady!" interrupted Cochrane, who seemed ready-witted and prompt to meet every emergency that might arise. "Return you now to the Lady Albertina—keep a command over your features and your feelings—and trust to me for the realization of whatsoever I have undertaken or promised."

Cochrane bowed with the deepest respect, and issued in haste from the armoury. Proceeding at once to Redman, he obtained from the lieutenant permission to use some of his men as messengers; and he sent off a couple of these couriers without delay—one bearing a despatch for the King in Edinburgh, the other for the Earl of Bassentyne, addressed to his lordship at his own castle. These transactions were finished before the vertical position of the sun proclaimed the hour of noon.

Time was passing—the moment at length approached when according to the assurance which she had received, Albertina might hope to be clasped in her father's arms. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when the watchers on the Donjon announced the advance of a band of warriors from the south; and in a very short time the Earl of Caithness was recognised, by the side of Sir Casimir D'Este, at the head of all the mounted portion of the Roslin troops that had won such fame at Hermitage; for the remainder (the infantry division) had tarried behind to serve as a garrison at the captured castle, until Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan should be enabled to make other arrangements for the tenure of his newly acquired fortalice.

And now we might elaborate a pathetic description of the meeting of the father and daughter,—how the Earl folded the beautiful Albertina in his arms—how he strained her again and again to his breast—and how she plenteously wept for very joy. We might also enter into minute details respecting the affectionate kindness with which the Earl of Caithness thanked Margaret for the devoted interest she had shown in his behalf—or how he enthusiastically spoke to her of the valour of her noble-hearted brother. And we might also minutely describe how Albertina expressed her gratitude towards the Teutonic Knight—and how Margaret spoke to him in a similar strain—and how both the young ladies testified their admiration of the consummate skill as a chieftain and the redoubtable prowess as a warrior, which, according to the accounts they had received, Sir Casimir had displayed in the fight of yesterday. And then too there were so many matters to discuss—so many explanations to be mutually given, that if we were to describe them all at length, we should occupy whole chapters. We must therefore leave much to the imagination of the reader, at least for the present—though there are one or two points to which we are now in a condensed aggregate alluding, that we must speak of on a future occasion,—such as

the treatment which the Earl of Caithness had received at Hermitage Castle—the compacts which had been made with the Earl of Douglas after the capture of the fortalice—and lastly the nature of the wrongs sustained by that lady of wild and fearful beauty, Elvira Ramsay.

An hour or so had been passed in discourse in the drawing-room after the return of the Earl of Caithness and Sir Casimir D'Este, when something was suddenly recalled to the mind of the latter by a turn which the conversation took.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Teutonic Knight, "there's the roguish priest Father Julius who must be set at liberty, according to the pledge which I gave him; for all that he told me has proved to be correct."

"Then let your word be kept, my excellent friend," said the Earl of Caithness. "Ah! here is Redman! He comes, doubtless, to receive some orders—"

"I was about to inquire of your lordship," said the lieutenant, "what course is to be adopted with the chaplain of Tantallon Castle?"

"The very individual concerning whom we were speaking at the moment you entered!" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness. "Receive your mandates, Redman, on that score, from Sir Casimir D'Este."

"The command is briefly summed up," said the Teutonic Knight: "let Father Julius be set at liberty."

"It shall be done," replied Redman; and he quitted the apartment.

There was now an influx of many of the tenants upon the Earl's domain, who came speeding to the castle to testify their joy at their lord's restoration to his home; and thus there was merry-making in the pleasure-grounds. Margaret was compelled to appear there with her friends, and to seem as if she felt an undivided sympathy with the general rejoicings; whereas she would have fain retired to her own chamber to ponder upon the incidents, which the progress of the next few hours might bring about. When, as usual, at the sunset hour the drawbridge was raised, the portcullis was lowered, the gates were shut, and the castle made secure for the night—and when she subsequently found that the silence of the entrance-ports was not broken by the din of lowering that bridge, raising that portcullis, or opening those gates to give any belated visitor admission—she wondered how it was possible that the King could meet her within the walls of Roslin that night. Had Cochrane deceived her on any point? or was he himself deceived?—or had there merely arisen some temporary disappointment? Or, on the other hand, was the King already in the castle? had he actually arrived under some impenetrable disguise? All was mystery and suspense; and the nearer approached the hour for the inmates of Roslin to retire to their respective chambers, the more violently fluttered Margaret's heart. But she concealed her agitation most effectually from the eyes of her friends.

Ah! what meant that sign which Stephen Cochrane made her as he traversed the landing at the moment when Margaret was pausing there to bid Albertina "Good night" ere they separated to their respective apartments? It was a sign so rapid and so slight as to be scarcely perceptible—but yet Margaret Fitz-Allan saw and comprehended it. It unmistakably conveyed an intimation that all went well, and that all was as he (the royal page) had in the forenoon shadowed forth!

"Good night, dearest Albertina," said Margaret. "You have now no care—your father is restored—and you will sleep happily to-night!"

"And you, dearest Margaret, will sleep happily

likewise: for your soul and mine sympathize in all their sources of joy!"

The two young ladies parted. Cochrane had already disappeared amidst the darkness at the extremity of the passage; and Margaret, with a lamp in her hand, continued her way. Proceeding to her chamber, she on some pretext dispensed with the services of her maids, and at once dismissed them to their slumbers. Her heart was wildly palpitating: and no wonder—for she aspired to become a queen, and she felt as if her fate now depended upon the cast of a die!—she knew that she had reached a most important crisis of her life! She went forth from her room—noiselessly she stole along—she reached the door of the armoury. Her hand trembled upon the latch: she nerved herself with all her natural courage to become composed: she opened that door—she entered.

Her eyes—those superb brilliant eyes—were swept around, flashing with expectation, hope, and suspense. Was *he* there? Should she meet anybody?—and if so, whom? Ah! a form bounds forward!—and with what wild feelings does the damsel's heart now thrill!

"Margaret! beloved Margaret!" exclaimed that well-known voice of rich masculine harmony: and the maiden's hand was pressed with fervour to the lips of the King.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DECREES OF THE BLACK PARLIAMENT.

THE Scottish Monarch was dressed in the most elegant manner—the graceful costume setting off his fine person to the fullest advantage. It was not a mere travelling suit that he wore; but, borrowing an expression from the present times, it was what we should term full evening dress. The velvet doublet or surcoat was edged with miniver: the under garment or tunic was richly embroidered. A massive gold chain, with the Order of St. Andrew appended to it, hung round the Monarch's neck: the rings upon his fingers were worth the ransom of one of his own royal rank. His cap was decorated with white and crimson plumes; a carcanet of diamonds glistened in front, throwing out jets of vivid light as if there were a halo above the Sovereign's brow. His countenance was radiant with happiness; and never had he seemed so handsome in the eyes of Margaret—never had so much elegance of manner and gracefulness of bearing appeared to mingle with the natural dignity of the Monarch and the frank familiar tenderness which he displayed towards her.

And how looked Margaret herself? Does the reader suppose that having for so many hours cherished the hope of meeting the King at this place and at this moment, she had been careless of her toilet? No!—in anticipation of this memorable interview, she had apparelled herself in raiment which though of rich material, was nevertheless more remarkable for its tasteful simplicity and its absence of superfluous ornament. A necklace of pearls, fastened by a diamond clasp, was the only article of jewellery which she wore; and none other required she—for the magnificence of her beauty needed no artificial adornment. An embroidered cap, of the blended materials of satin and velvet, defined rather than concealed the beautiful shape of her head; and thence all the wealth of her luxuriant raven hair floated upon her shoulders and down her back. To the little embroidered cap to which we have alluded, a veil was attached: it now hung behind the symmetrical form of the damsel—but in

a moment it could be drawn over her head to constitute the veil of a bride. Marvellously handsome did she seem, as with glowing cheeks, and downcast eyes, and a manner the tremulousness of which was half real, half assumed, she abandoned to the King the hand which he pressed so fervidly to his lips, as in his voice of rich masculine harmony, he exclaimed, "Margaret! beloved Margaret!"

Almost immediately after Margaret Fitz-Allan had entered the armoury by the usual and proper entrance from the stone passage, a secret door opened in a remote recess. Noiselessly it turned upon its hinges—for they had previously been oiled with a view to this effect; and Stephen Cochrane stole across the threshold. There he halted—but he kept the door ajar so that at any instant he might retreat without being perceived by those to whose discourse he had thus come to listen.

"Margaret! beloved Margaret!" said the King; "you have given me this proof of your attachment—and now the moment has come when I am about to kneel at your feet, to reiterate the assurances of love which I have before made, and to solicit this hand which I press to my lips!"

"Oh, sire!" murmured Margaret, "you kneel to me?" for the King was suiting the action to the word, and sinking on one knee before her.

"Yes, Margaret—I kneel," he said, in a voice that was now tremulous with the blissful emotions that filled his heart, "to thank thee for the rich boon of thy love which thou hast bestowed upon me—to pledge myself that thy welfare and happiness shall be my paramount consideration—"

"And mine honour likewise!" said Margaret, bending down so that her fragrant breath fanned the cheek of the King, as he still remained on one knee before her.

"Yes—and thine honour likewise!" rejoined David: then rising from the suppliant posture, he passed his arm around her waist, exclaiming with accents of passionate admiration, "Oh, you are exceedingly beautiful, Margaret!—and I love you—by all the blessed saints! I love you more than language can depict! Were you confident, my beloved, of meeting me here to-night? did you experience no suspense—"

"I did, sire," answered Margaret: "for I knew not how you could penetrate within these walls silently and secretly—unknown to all around—"

"Ah, Margaret!" said the King, with a tender look and tone, "love sharpens the wits even of those who are already astute and intelligent, while it enhances the courage of those who were already sufficiently daring. Yet to speak truly, I ought not to take unto myself any particular merits of keenness or daring; for the faithful Cochrane has contrived and arranged it all, and I did but follow the plan as he sketched it out. Know you not that there was a continuous influx of persons all the afternoon and evening into the castle, to make a demonstration of joy and welcome on the occasion of the Earl's return? It was not therefore so very difficult for me to penetrate within these walls, under a deep disguise. Cochrane was in readiness to receive me; and in his chamber I found a safe and secure refuge. Admirably has he managed everything; for he has made a friend or two within these walls—"

"Who can they be?" inquired Margaret, her wonder thus suddenly excited on the point.

"No matter who they are, my best beloved!" exclaimed the King. "I myself know not—I have scarcely had any thought for any subject but your own dear image, and for the ceremony which is presently to make you mine! Behold, dearest! here is the ring—the faithful Cochrane sleeps not—he is

doubtless now busy at his work—the tapers are being lighted on the altar—the priest is donning his robes—the minutes are passing quickly, Margaret!—and every moment may we now expect the faithful Cochrane to come to summon us to the bridal altar!"

"Sire!" said Margaret, now in her turn kneeling at the King's feet, "you are about to bestow upon me the highest of honours and to give me the most signal proof of affection! Believe me, sire—Oh! believe me, when I declare that in return for this great love of your's I shall ever prove a dutiful wife—affectionate and obedient—carefully making your happiness my constant study—and in all things seeking to retain your good opinion and esteem!"

As she thus knelt, her hands were clasped as if in the fervour with which her soul gave utterance, through the medium of the lips, to those assurances; her countenance was upturned towards the King—the light of the lamp in the armoury fell upon her face, defining with Rembrandt effect her nobly formed features, displaying the vermilion of the lips, the pearly whiteness of the teeth, the outline of the softly and sensuously rounded chin. Her magnificent dark eyes looked up in all their luminous glory; and as the King contemplated the superb creature as she knelt at his feet, his regards rapidly travelled over all that beauty of feature and all the noble symmetry of her shape,—these flowing outlines of the contours and proportions that were modelled to the nicest statuesque precision, and yet to a Hebe richness! He felt as if he could scarcely believe in the happiness that awaited him: his soul was almost steeped in a fount of rapture; and taking her hands, he exclaimed, "Rise, Margaret!—rise, dearest! and let me fold thee in my arms!"

She suffered the King to raise her up—she sank upon his breast—he covered her cheeks with kisses. But only for a few instants did she thus abandon herself to those fervid demonstrations of love on his part; and again sinking upon her knees, she extended her clasped hands towards him, exclaiming, "Sire, I crave a boon!—a boon which thou must bestow before I can accompany thee to the altar!"

"A boon, dearest Margaret!" said the enraptured and infatuated King: "what do you require at my hands? Speak! name your wish! it is already as good as granted!"

"Oh, sire," she faltered forth, "I tremble all over—I feel as if I were kneeling as a traitress and criminal at your feet!—though heaven knows that I as well as my brother are innocent of the crime of our forefather?"

"By St. Andrew! Margaret, you alarm me!" cried the King: "what is it that you mean? The words *traitor* and *criminal* associated with thee, my beloved—or with thy chivalrous brother? No! it is impossible!"

"Yes, sire—it is impossible so far as we ourselves are concerned!" exclaimed Margaret fervently: "but the law, sire, may brand as traitors those who are in reality the most devoted to their King: for who can be more devoted to your Highness than I, the loving Margaret, who now kneels at your feet?"

"I know it, my best beloved," cried the King. "Rise, I beseech you!—tell me what you require! Speak quick, dearest Margaret!—time presses—the tapers are doubtless lighted—the priest must be in readiness—"

"No, sire—I will never rise from this suppliant posture," exclaimed Margaret, "until you swear that you will grant the boon which I am about to demand at your hands!"

So wondrously handsome seemed the damsel, with her flashing eyes, her glowing cheeks, and her heaving bosom, as she knelt at the King's feet, that the infatuated monarch would at the instant have handed over his soul to Satan if such a compact had been the sole condition on which he could obtain possession of the splendid Margaret. Besides, he was reckless of oaths when he believed that there were no witnesses present to attest them and able to stand forward at any future day in corroboration thereof. He accordingly exclaimed, "Speak, dearest—speak! You have already received my pledge: but I repeat it. What has Margaret now to ask of the King?"

"Sire," she said, her voice now changing from excitement into solemnity, "I beseech your pardon for having suffered myself to be wooed under a name which is not my own; and I implore your Highness graciously to suffer me to declare my real name at the altar as the only one by which I may legally and lawfully give response to the questions that will be put to me from the lips of the holy priest!"

"Oh! everything shall be as you will, Margaret!" exclaimed the King. "I care not who you are or what you may be! All I know is that I love you—that I adore you—and that so long as you yourself are virtuous and good, as I know you to be, I hold you utterly exempt and free from any criminal taint descending from your ancestors! To all this I pledge myself: my royal word is given!"

"Sire, I thank thee!" exclaimed Margaret, springing up to her feet, and now of her own accord flinging her arms about the monarch's neck, and imprinting a kiss upon his cheek. "Listen, sire!—a few words will serve as a sufficient preface!"

"Proceed, my beloved:"—and the King, retaining his arm thrown round Margaret's waist, gazed upon her with the most impassioned ardour as she went on speaking.

"It is nearly forty years ago, sire," she said, "that a conspiracy as flagitious as it was for a moment formidable, was organized against your Majesty's illustrious father the mighty Bruce——"

"True, Margaret!" said King David: "it was a conspiracy which if it had succeeded, would have proved one of the foulest crimes that ever disgraced a nation's history! Even to imagine and design such dark turpitude was an enormity at which the soul shudders! The assassination of my glorious father, the deliverer of his native land from the fierce Southrons—the assassination, I say, of such a patriot and such a King—Oh! the idea itself was monstrous! and if carried out, would have plunged Scotland into the lowest abyss of miseries! But tell me, sweet Margaret—for you yourself are innocent,—was any ancestor of thine implicated therein?"

"Listen to me, sire," she resumed, with the melting softness of a voice that seemed under the influence of sadness; "and a few more words will suffice for all that it is now necessary to explain. Yes, sire—you are right! That conspiracy was an infamous one—transcendently wicked in every respect! To contemplate the assassination of your noble father to make way for William de Soulis,—Oh! *this* was to dream of punishing virtue, valour, and efficiency, in order that vice, cowardice, and incompetency might be rewarded! You see, sire, that I speak in no measured terms of that conspiracy; and therefore must I loathe the memory of the conspirators, even though amongst them there was an ancestor of mine own! Permit me to remind your Grace that history's page records in dark letters the names of the principal accomplices

of Sir William de Soulis; and these were Sir David de Brechin—the Countess of Strathern—Sir William Malherbe—Sir John Logie——"

"Ah! and history also declares," said David, "that it was this same Sir John Logie who in his fierce hatred against my father, and in his strong partisanship for the wretched aspirant William de Soulis, undertook to deal the death-blow which might render the throne of the Bruce vacant and plunge all Scotland into mourning!"

"Yes, sire," resumed Margaret; "it was Sir John Logie who proved himself the worst and the vilest of the whole flagitious band!"

"And amongst them was your ancestor, Margaret?" said the King. "But you have not told me which was he?"

"And heaven be thanked," continued the damsel, without heeding David's question, "that the conspiracy exploded and that the iniquitous designs of the traitors were all crushed under the iron heel of the glorious and mighty Robert Bruce! With the exception of William de Soulis and the Countess of Strathern, all the conspirators were put to death. Never was death more righteously inflicted or more signally deserved! Then followed the deliberations and decrees of the Black Parliament; and those decrees were terrible! Vengeance was to be inflicted upon the conspirators until the third and fourth generations, so that fearful was the punishment thus entailed upon the posterity of those guilty persons! The names of Brechin, Malherbe, Logie, Brown, and others became accursed—a ban was placed upon them—the bearers of those names were thenceforth to be accounted as infamous—they were to be regarded as outlaws—incapable of holding estates upon the Scottish soil—doomed to eternal exile—or else at their life's peril to set foot within Caledonia's boundaries! And these decrees of the Black Parliament have struck the families of those conspirators!—their consequences have clung to us like a leprosy, which we have sought to conceal by disguises—by subterfuges——"

"Oh, enough! enough, Margaret!" exclaimed the King; "it is impossible to hold *you*, my beloved, responsible for the crimes committed by your ancestor long before you were born! I, your King, pardon and absolve you, and thus invest you with that position of legality which until this moment you possessed not! Yes, my beloved Margaret—I forgive you, if indeed there be ought to forgive on the part of one who loves you so tenderly and devotedly as I! It is true, dearest, that I have entertained strong feelings in respect to the maintenance of the decrees of the Black Parliament: I have been appealed to more than once that I would set them aside as an hereditary vengeance unworthy of a monarch: but I have refused, Margaret—I have refused—not because there is a natural cruelty or malignity in my disposition, but because methought that in these troublous times it was requisite to maintain over men's minds as many sources of wholesome terror as possible! Besides, I have ever cherished, Margaret, the profoundest veneration for whatsoever was done or promulgated, in form of law or statute, decree or ordinance, in the time of my illustrious father, the great and glorious Robert Bruce of immortal memory! Thus was it, Margaret, that I have from time to time refused to repeal, rescind, or abrogate the decrees of the Black Parliament. But, Oh, my beloved! when from *your* sweet lips comes the appeal——"

"Sire, I love thee!" murmured Margaret, with a melting look, as if she were deeply touched by this evidence of the King's affection.

"Yes, my beloved Margaret," he continued, straining her to his breast,—"*when in the soft har-*

mony of *your* speech the intercession is wafted, I yield—I yield!—and while under existing circumstances it were almost ridiculous to make a merit of showing such grace and favour unto thee, yet may you esteem it as a proof of my heart's devotion that I proclaim equal pardon and grace in reference to your brother, the brave Fleming!"

"Sire, on my knees I thank thee!" said Margaret: and she was sinking down to that suppliant posture, when the King prevented her by catching her in his arms and once more straining her to his breast.

"Yes, dearest Margaret—yes, darling of my soul!" he exclaimed, "grace and pardon are bestowed upon thyself and thy brother—no matter which name of the hitherto branded ones ye do veritably and truly bear,—whether it be Brechin, or Malherbe, or Brown, or Logie! Yes—even though it be Logie itself—that name which most of all I have execrated,—yet even for *thy* sake, Margaret—"

"Oh, sire! so much love," she exclaimed, as it thrilling throughout her entire frame with ineffable rapture,—“so much love as this demands a lifetime of devotion on my part in return! and it shall be thine!"

"I know it—I know it, dearest Margaret!" cried the King, again and again pressing her to his heart and covering her lips, and her cheeks, and her brow with kisses. "But still you have not mentioned the name of your ancestor?—the name which is properly your own instead of that of Fitz-Allan?"

"Do not press me now, sire," said Margaret entreatingly. "You are about to lead me to the altar—and it is there that it will be most fitting to announce it!"

"Be it as you will, Margaret!" exclaimed the King. "But, Ah! one word? Does Stephen Cochrane know of all this?"

"No, sire," responded Margaret. "It was a secret which could be breathed only to the ear of my Sovereign—that Sovereign who had honoured me with his love and who was about to become my husband!"

Thus speaking, Margaret's head drooped upon the Monarch's breast; and at the same instant a strange expression flitted over David's countenance,—an expression that had something sinister in it—the evidences of fierce libertine passion being mingled with a sardonic triumph. It almost instantaneously passed away, as if involuntarily it had come thither; and the look which now met Margaret's, as her face was slowly upturned towards the monarch's, was full of the same enthusiastic love as before.

"Yes, dearest," he said; "you shall at the altar tell me your rightful name. But, ah! why comes not Cochrane? Time has been flitting by—it must be near midnight—"

"Is it possible," asked Margaret, now trembling with alarm, "that aught can have occurred to interfere with Master Cochrane's arrangements?"

"Let us hope not," said the King. "He seemed full of confidence: for while in his chamber ere now, I changed my apparel and assumed a toilet that was seemly for the occasion, albeit though the ceremonial is a private one—he gave me such assurances—"

Here the door of the armoury opened; and Stephen Cochrane, entering with a demeanour of the profoundest respect, said, "May it please your Grace, all is prepared."

The wily page had remained concealed in the armoury till he had gleaned every salient and important particular of the discourse which took place between the King and Margaret: then quickly retreating, he noiselessly closed that secret door—he returned by a private passage into the stone corridor—he knew that everything was in

readiness in the chapel—and speeding into the armoury by the regular entrance, he made that announcement to the King.

"Come, my beloved!" whispered David, with tender looks and accents as he proffered Margaret his arm.

Her heart fluttered violently as she took it. David pressed her hand, whispering the most melting words in her ear; and thus they threaded the passage which led to the chapel, Stephen Cochrane leading the way. On reaching the door of the oratorio, Cochrane gave three gentle taps with his finger: the portal was opened—Margaret's glance was flung with nervous quickness upon the countenance of him who appeared within the threshold—she at once recognised it:—it was that of Redman the lieutenant. This individual threw upon her a significant look, and made the sign of the cross.

Margaret's heart leapt with joy; for whatsoever lingering mistrust there might have been in her thoughts in reference to this secret ceremony, was now completely banished. She knew that Redman was her friend: the significant look which he flung upon her, was to remind her that *this* was not the *only* secret in reference to herself of which he was cognizant; while the signing of the cross might be taken as a solemn attestation of his good faith and sincerity.

Two tapers were burning feebly upon the altar, in front of which stood an individual in the robes of a priest. The King and Margaret entered, attended by Stephen Cochrane; and no other persons were present in the oratorio beyond those whose names have within the last few sentences been mentioned. The priest at the altar was a perfect stranger to Margaret: but this was a circumstance that now gave her not any trouble—for she felt assured that Redman had watched over her interests—and moreover Stephen Cochrane had faithfully promised to afford her proofs, signal and unmistakable, of the perfect legality and validity of this ceremony. He had not yet done this: but Margaret felt tolerably well convinced that by some means he would do so with the least possible delay; for hitherto he had faithfully and to the very letter fulfilled every promise he had made her or everything he had undertaken to perform. And now indeed, while these thoughts were flitting through Margaret's brain—and while leaning upon the King's arm, she was advancing from the portals of the oratorio towards the altar—Redman presented a small bouquet of flowers, saying at the same time, "Permit me, Mistress Margaret, as one who has known you from your infancy, to proffer you this sincerely meant but humble testimonial of my respect—my esteem—and my friendship!"

Margaret acknowledged in a few suitable words the speech thus addressed her, at the same time accepting the bouquet. Redman seized the opportunity to whisper a few words in Margaret's ear, and which totally escaped the attention of the King. It was the work of an instant!—Margaret flung a look of intelligence and gratitude upon Redman; and then as she was sweeping her regards towards the priestly-looking individual at the altar, she met the eyes of Stephen Cochrane, who was steadily surveying her. His look was as much as to imply that he had now fulfilled all his pledges and promises to the very letter: and Margaret with an equally significant glance acknowledged that it was so.

Before the altar knelt the King of Scotland and that young lady—the royal David and the descendant of a traitorous ancestor!—there they knelt, assuredly as hands and a pair as the eye could wish to gaze upon—but whether well mated, is a question that must be solved in future chapters of our

narrative. Behind, at a respectful distance, stood Stephen Cochrane and the lieutenant Redman—the only witnesses of this ceremony on which the priest was now entering! Feebly burnt the tapers; for Redman had not dared to have too strong a light in the oratorio, for fear lest it should penetrate through the draperies (which were closed) and be seen by the sentinels without. Low and monotonous was the voice of the officiating individual; and there was a moment when the thought struck strangely cold to the heart of Margaret that this was an ominous and inauspicious ceremony altogether. But as she glanced towards the monarch who knelt by her side, she perceived that his looks were full of tenderness: perhaps she took the impassioned fervour of those regards for the ardour of admiration:—and her transient misgivings vanished.

And now came that part of the ceremony when according to the marriage ritual of those times, the priest demanded the names of the pair who knelt before him, beginning with the bridegroom.

"My son," said the officiating minister, "on this occasion full well do I know to whom my allegiance is due—and thus the interrogatory I am about to put is but for the fulfilment of a ceremony. Your name, my son?"

"David Bruce," answered the monarch.

There was a brief pause; and then the priest asked, "And your name, daughter?"

The King was full of suspense as to what the reply would be: the damsel flung upon him a look as if to remind him of his solemn pledge of grace and pardon; and then she said in a low but firm voice, "My name is Margaret Logie."

The King started for an instant as he knelt there—but only for an instant. No wonder that for a moment he should have been thus perturbed and that the name should have struck discordantly upon his ear: for it was the name of that very conspirator who, more vile and iniquitous than all the rest, had undertaken to plunge the assassin dagger into the heart of the illustrious Robert Bruce, the father of the Monarch who now knelt there by Margaret's side! Yes—the mention of that name of *Logie* grated for a single moment horribly against the nerves of King David: but at the instant a warm, soft hand touched his own—a pair of superb dark eyes were looking up deprecatingly and entreatingly into his countenance—the evil impression vanished—the strong passion of love's infatuation seized upon him again—and moreover there was *something else* passing in his mind which helped so effectually to subdue that transitory repugnance!

The ceremony progressed: the ring was placed by the royal David upon the finger of the beautiful Margaret Logie—the nuptial benediction was bestowed—and as they rose up from their kneeling posture, the Monarch embraced the lady, exclaiming in a low but impassioned tone, "My bride! my wife!"

"Say also your Queen!" murmured Margaret, with an indescribable luxury of feeling.

"Yes—my Queen," added the King, but in a tone that was slightly altered, though Margaret perceived it not—for she felt herself to be a Queen and she was supremely happy!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TANTALLON CASTLE.

At the south-eastern corner of what may be termed the mouth of the mighty Firth of Forth, stood the celebrated Castle of Tantallon. Situated about a couple of miles to the eastward of the town of North Berwick, this fortress was not merely the most formidable in the county of East Lothian (or Haddington, as it is now called) but likewise one of the strongest and most famous in all Scotland. Its position was fearfully romantic and wildly picturesque. Built upon the summit of a huge promontory of rock, it looked from three of its sides upon the water, and thus on these points was impregnable—for the rock was escarped and rugged, and the ocean formed a natural moat at its feet. On the land-side the fortalice was defended by double lines of ramparts, each having a deep ditch,—the inner one of which was of great width and depth, with a bottom composed of several feet of a thick mud, so that for a besieging force to attempt to make its way across this inner fosse was to dare almost certain destruction. Irregular in shape, and displaying the architecture of different centuries from a very remote date, the buildings of Tantallon were spacious and lofty; while the massiveness of its towers, the strength of its outworks, and all its natural defences, rendered it the appropriate seat of that proud family which acknowledged none other as its equal—which was so often wont to set the law at defiance—and which even at times bearded the authority of Royalty itself.

But now, in the present age, as the traveller pursues his path along the shore of Haddington—or as the voyager stands upon the deck of a vessel ploughing its way amidst the German Ocean into the mouth of the Forth—he beholds not the mighty edifice where the haughtiest of chieftains in times past exercised so great an influence over Caledonia's destinies where an establishment upon a princely scale was maintained—where the court-yards, the halls, and the ante-rooms were thronged with fierce men-at-arms, Border warriors, moss-troopers, jack-men, pages, squires, and lacqueys—where banquets were given on the most magnificent scale of the rude baronial hospitality of feudal times or where the massive walls and the indented rocks echoed with the clash of weapons in the joust or tournament, or with the still deeper din of sterner battle in siege, assault, and defence. No!—that memorable structure meets not now the eye of the traveller who approaches the spot by land, or of the voyager by sea: naught but a stretch of dismantled wall and a remnant of a dilapidated tower exist to mark the site of Tantallon's once proud fortalice!

At a distance of about a mile and a half from the promontory where these ruins stand, is an insular mass of rock, almost of a circular shape, about a mile in circumference, with a sloping table eminence, the altitude of the highest point being about four hundred feet. It is known as the Bass Rock; and seldom around its precipitous sides is the water calm enough to enable vessels to approach—but for far the greater portion of the year the waves eddy, and boil, and dash, and thunder all about the foot of this little granite isle. By one narrow passage only is the Bass Rock accessible; and near that landing-place a castle stood in former times, occupying indeed the edge of the entire side of rock facing the promontory where Tantallon itself stood. But as in the days of their gloomy grandeur and their solemn stateliness, those two castles could look towards each other, so does it appear that in companionship



No. 14.—MARGARET.

have they yielded to the influence of time; and now on the edge of the Bass Rock, as on the promontory of Tantallon, naught but a grim skeleton ruin looks down from the stark rugged eminence of cliff to meet the eye of the voyager upon the deck of the vessel ploughing its way towards the Forth.

Strange and wondrous caverns are there in the Bass Rock: but there is one grand subterranean more marvellous in its natural existence and more terrific in its aspect than all the rest. For it perforates the base of the little granite island completely through from east to west; and being about six hundred yards in length, the darkness which prevails in the middle is never illumined by the light of day. Stupendous is that Darkness!—but Silence, whom Nature has for the most part appointed to be the inseparable associate of the other, holds not her reign in that cavern. For even on the calmest day the smallest ripples raise echoes which become loud reverberations while passing through the awful subterranean: but when the wind blows and the billows beat, then how fearful is the din within the cave!—so that no human language can describe the appalling horrors of the scene at such times when the war of elements is at its utmost—when the tempest is raging, the thunder is crashing, and the German Ocean is pouring all the frantic fury of its waves through the cavern of the Bass Rock!

It was the afternoon of the day following the incidents related in the preceding chapter; and the Black Douglas was pacing to and fro in his apartment at Tantallon Castle. Chafing like a lion in his cage, the terrible chief seemed to feel as if a state of quiescence were impossible—as if there were within him those passions and emotions which by some means or another must find a vent—as if the furious instincts which thus inspired him would prompt him almost to spring upon the first who should approach, no matter though they should be the most faithful and devoted of his servitors. There was a sinister light in his eyes—lurid and fixed—not flashing and gleaming—and therefore all the more terribly ominous on that account. Indeed, the Earl of Douglas felt as if everything were going wrong with him—as if his evil star were terribly in the ascendant—as if fortune were determined to be perverse—and as if life had suddenly become a quagmire in which he floundered more and more the further he advanced!

“By Satan!” he muttered to himself, “all these misfortunes must be redeemed, and the pending calamities must be averted!—or else I, the proud Douglas, shall sink under their weight! By the shades of my fathers! I will do something desperate or perish in the attempt! How is it that fortune has thus turned upon me? Ah! from the moment when my weapon dealt the assassin blow against my aged kinsman, the Knight of Liddesdale, all hath gone wrong with me! Is there, then, truth in what priestly doctrines proclaim of retribution in this world as well as punishment hereafter? But if so, how could a Douglas have ever flourished?—for where is the Douglas who hath not waded knee-deep in blood and been besmeared by gore up to his very elbows? But Ah! I see ’twas different! My forefathers fought in fair strife—whereas my hand dealt the blow of an assassin!”

These ideas, which forced themselves upon the mind of the Black Douglas, made a most powerful impression: the deepest gloom, fraught even with sadness and with a foreboding expression, came over his countenance. He strove to divert his thoughts into another channel—but he could not: and the sources of his bitter irritation—the circumstances which had so chafed his haughty spirit and

lacerated his proud soul—stalked through his imagination like a grim procession of ghastliest spectres.

“Yes,” he said within himself, in his compulsory musings,—“every misfortune dates from the moment when my hand laid aside the weapon of a noble chivalry which it was wont to wield, and grasped the assassin brand! Misfortune thereafter struck me blow upon blow! Denounced and exposed in the judgment-hall of Melrose, I found myself branded as the plunderer of my kinsman’s revenues! Defeated in the lists at Roslin, I became branded as that kinsman’s murderer! Beaten at the Castle of Hermitage, I have been forced to render up the broad lands which should have been mine! Accused by the false and perfidious Elvira, I shall shortly have to face fresh infamies—fresh degradations!—aye, and perhaps to suffer penalties which I may be powerless to avert, and which no one who ever yet bore the name of Douglas could have thought of enduring! Oh, all this is intolerable! But worst, worst of all was the loss of fame in the lists at Roslin! Oh, that the Douglas should have been levelled to the dust by the arm of a stripling! But there must be vengeance! Ah—and my limbs yet ache, and my form is bruised and stiff, with the violent discomfiture sustained upon the drawbridge at the hands of the Teutonic Knight! For this also there must be vengeance! And the Earl of Caithness?—vengeance again! Oh, madman that I am to think and talk of vengeance! How could it be wreaked—how can it be accomplished when all the world seem to be turning against me?”

These last words were spoken aloud in the terrible concentrated bitterness of the Black Earl’s spirit. He stopped short and dashed his clenched fist violently against his breast: but he started on hearing some words spoken from the threshold of the door.

“Why should my gracious lord complain that all the world have deserted him, when here is his faithful servitor who will go through fire itself to further the views of the Douglas?”

“Ah, good Magnus!” said the Earl, “is it you? Assuredly I ought not to have included yourself amongst the number of my enemies. Be seated, good Magnus—and let us confer together.”

Balveny—who was suffering fearfully from the wounds which he had received at the hands of young Seton at Hermitage Castle, the day but one previously—dragged himself painfully into the apartment, and sank upon a seat near the table. His right arm was in a sling: his head was bandaged—his face was ghastly with loss of blood—but the fire of malignant wickedness was not quenched in his eyes.

“Let us see, Magnus,” said the Earl, placing himself likewise at the table, and preparing to make *memoranda* upon a paper that lay before him,—“let us see how stands the Douglas now in reference to the number of good fighting men whose services he may command.”

“The computation is soon made, my lord,” said Magnus Balveny. “Four hundred warriors mustered beneath your banner at the Castle of Hermitage. Of that force two hundred, including the twelve knights, belonged to the domain of Teviotdale and Liddesdale—that is to say, of Hermitage itself. The other two hundred were of your lordship’s own retainers of the Closeburn district. All those must now be put out of the question; for the Teviotdale and Liddesdale men have doubtless by this time acknowledged Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan as their chief—”

“Maledictions upon him!” ejaculated the Earl, with sombre fierceness.

"Yes—and upon all your lordship's enemies!" added Magnus Balveny. "But in reference to this present computation, I was about to explain that your lordship's own retainers of the Closeburn district who fought at Hermitage, have bound themselves by oaths never again to bear arms against Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan or the Earl of Caithness. Now, then, my lord, it is easy to compute how many warriors could be mustered, if need were, from the surface of your baronial domains properly pertaining to Tantallon. Some five or six hundred in all. Yet these, if once within this proud fortalice, might be held as good as a thousand behind walls of inferior strength—aye, and equal to an army of as many thousands that might come to besiege us! But what ideas are now crossing your lordship's brain?"

"Magnus," said the Earl, without answering the question, "do you bear in mind that in case of some desperate deed being attempted, we have the Earl of Caithness with all the warriors of Roslin against us!—we have Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, with all the Borderers of Liddesdale, Teviotdale, and Eskdale against us,—after being recently for us!—while the Earl of Bassentyne would be on the side of our enemies!"

Here the door opened; and a domestic entered to announce that Father Julius had just returned to Tantallon, and desired an audience of his noble patron the Earl.

"Bid the priest enter," exclaimed the Black Douglas: and in a few minutes Father Julius made his appearance.

"My most gracious lord," he said, after having given the usual benediction, "it is in the unusual language of sympathy and condolence, instead of congratulation, that I have now to address your lordship. For hitherto, on all occasions within my memory, whatsoever ventures or enterprises a Douglas undertook, were always followed by success. Alas, now it is different—"

"Sir Priest," ejaculated the Earl fiercely, "is this language of thine meant in a taunting spirit?"

"No, my lord," exclaimed Father Julius: "by all the blessed saints I vow that I speak in a spirit of sympathy and condolence—but at the same time in wonder that the star of the Douglas should have thus paled and changed into the descendant!"

"Cease this prating, Sir Priest," interrupted the Earl of Douglas sternly,—"unless thou hast counsel to proffer us or useful suggestions to afford after your sojourn at Roslin. I learnt from Sir Casimir D'Este of the failure of your enterprise to entrap the Lady Albertina: for he proclaimed all this in the presence of the Earl of Caithness at Hermitage Castle, in order that the Earl might taunt me—"

"My lord, it was not my fault that I failed," interrupted Father Julius. "All that man could do to achieve success was performed by me: but if accident brought that Teutonic Knight and his squire upon the spot at the moment, it was veritably no fault of mine—"

"Enough!" ejaculated the Earl impatiently: "it is one of the by-gones that are useless to be deplored, and the merest thought of which chafes one's spirit terribly! Come, Father Julius—you were wont to be expert in counsel: what advice would you proffer in the present strait in which you find your master?"

"To speak soothly, my lord," answered Father Julius, "I have so vaguely and partially heard the details of these new complications which have arisen so threateningly, that I scarce know how to judge of them. But if your lordship would be pleased to give me a minute account, so that I may rightly understand my noble patron's position in all respects,

it may be—nay, methinks that I might even go so far as to promise, that there is something I could suggest—something I could devise—"

"Ah! say you so, holy father?" exclaimed the Douglas: "then with this hope should I be inspired by patience sufficient to tell you everything, even though it were a narrative that might last from hence till to-morrow! Listen therefore, Sir Priest! You have doubtless heard enough to make you aware of the catastrophe at Hermitage—"

"All this I know, my lord," interjected Father Julius: "but 'tis of the compacts into which your lordship was forced that I have hitherto obtained but a vague outline, and whereof I now solicit the details."

"They are briefly summed up," rejoined the Earl of Douglas. "When Hermitage was stormed, I was lying unconscious on my couch,—drugged by the wine which the hand of a perfidious woman had administered! That woman—methought she had learned to love me!—methought that forgetting such past conduct on my side as she might have deemed an outrage—"

"Your lordship is speaking, I presume," said Father Julius, "of a certain lady whose presence at Hermitage was previously but little known nor suspected, even amongst your lordship's most devoted followers: for I myself was ignorant—"

"Make not such long speeches, Sir Priest!" interrupted Balveny. "The lady to whom his lordship alludes, bears the name of Elvira Ramsay—and let that suffice!"

"Awaking from that profound sleep into which the drugged wine had plunged me," continued the Earl of Douglas, "I found myself a prisoner. The Earl of Caithness, Sir Casimir D'Este, and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan were in a condition to dictate terms to me—yes, terms to me, the Earl of Douglas!—and I was perforce constrained to accept them!"

"And those terms, my lord?" asked the priest,—"I mean those which relate to the Lady Elvira?"

"The Lady Elvira had suddenly turned round upon me and become my foe! She told her tale of wrongs—whether real or imaginary, no matter—to those chiefs; and through their aid she demanded the means of making an appeal against me to the King. Yes!—she appeals for justice to the King against me, the Earl of Douglas!—she has made her accusations and she demands my punishment! The Earl of Caithness has therefore held me in particular guarantees to appear before the King or Scotland, on the thirtieth day from that date (the day before yesterday) to answer whatsoever plaint the Lady Elvira Ramsay may bring against me!"

"And what guarantee did your lordship give," inquired Father Julius, "that you would thus make a personal appearance at a given date before the King?"

"S'death! the recollection of the ignominy to which I was subjected is scarcely tolerable!"—and the Black Earl stamped his foot with rage. "Tell him, good Magnus! I cannot!"

"Know then, holy father," said Balveny, speaking in a whisper to the priest, "that our noble patron has signed a bond acknowledging the forfeiture to the crown of the Barony of North Berwick—the fairest part of his lordship's domain—if on the day specified he make not personal appearance before his Majesty to answer whatsoever plaint or charge the Lady Elvira Ramsay may have to bring. Yes!—to this degradation was the Earl of Douglas perforce reduced as the condition of obtaining his liberty after the Roslin warriors had stormed the Castle of Hermitage!"

"And what course thinks his lordship to pursue?" inquired Father Julius.

"Nay, we ask *your* counsel!" exclaimed Balveny aloud and impatiently. "What would you advise? To provoke a civil war were dangerous: but to appear before the King and answer the Lady Elvira's plaint is an alternative to which the Douglas never must be reduced!"

"My lord," said the priest, addressing himself to his noble patron, "if the Lady Albertina Roslin became the Countess of Douglas, might not all be settled amicably?—would not the Earl of Caithness rather seek to shield and protect than expose and punish his noble son-in-law, even though by force and violence he had won that fair damsel as his bride?"

"Aye! thou hast spoken truly, Sir Priest!" exclaimed the Earl, "and Albertina is the loveliest of maidens! To wed her no disagreeable mode, I ween, of cutting the Gordian knot of all these difficulties! But how, Sir Priest—"

"There is a means, my lord—yes, assuredly there is a means," responded Father Julius, "by which the Lady Albertina Roslin may be carried off from her father's castle. Nay, more! the very Castle itself, if your lordship so will it, may be captured!"

"Say you so?" exclaimed the Black Earl joyously. "By St. Bride of Bothwell! if you make good your words, Sir Priest, your reward shall be the richest that ever a proud peer bestowed upon a humble ecclesiastic!"

"I can but explain the means and point the way, my lord," rejoined Father Julius; "and this will I do. It will then be for others to aid in executing the design."

"And what if it should all fail?" ejaculated the Earl impatiently, "as everything else that we have ventured or attempted, has failed of late! Speak, Sir Priest! proffer us your counsel to the fullest details! What if this new scheme should fail, I repeat!—must the Douglas appear like a malefactor and a felon in the presence of the King to face the plaint of a crack-brained woman?"

Father Julius bent for a few moments a strange look upon the nobleman; and then in a tone of still more extraordinary confidence, he said, "The Earl of Douglas might perhaps deem it politic to appear before the King: but I, Father Julius—the humble ecclesiastic—do pledge myself that all shall on that day go well on behalf of thyself, my noble patron! Yes—this do I proclaim! I speak not at random—I am no madman—"

"Explain yourself, holy father! explain yourself!" exclaimed the Earl of Douglas: "what mean you?"

"No matter for the present!" rejoined the priest, firmly and decisively. "The use of *those* means must prove our last resource! In the meantime let us think of the first-named project."

"Yes—'twere indeed far better!" cried the Earl impatiently. "Thy secret, Father Julius, in respect to acquitting me in the presence of the King, may be valuable and delectable enough: but in good sooth so little can I bring myself to think that you possess any such power, or that it is otherwise than a wild dream which you are imagining,—that I infinitely prefer to fall back upon the other alternative! Show me, therefore, how to carry off the Lady Albertina—or what is better still, how to capture Roslin Castle; and then leave me to turn either of these achievements to such an account as shall change the whole aspect of affairs and make the cause of the Douglas rise triumphant above that of all his enemies!"

"Listen then, my lord," said Father Julius,—"and likewise you, Captain Balveny; and ye shall speedily judge whether my temporary sojourn in Roslin Castle hath proven usefully suggestive or not

for the furtherance of the views and interests of the Douglas!"

Then were all three—Earl, Captain, and Priest—soon plunged in deep and earnest consultation: but it is not now necessary to record what was taking place between them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BASSENTYNE CASTLE.

AT a distance of but a few miles from Roslin Castle, was situated the castellated mansion of the young Earl of Bassentyne. As the reader has seen, this nobleman was on his march at the head of his retainers, in a southward direction, to join the troops of Roslin and fight against the Earl of Douglas at Hermitage,—when he was met by young Seton, who informed him of the glorious exploits which had put so speedy a termination to the feudal strife in that quarter. Roland of Bassentyne was rejoiced to hear of the liberation of the Earl of Caithness; nor less was he pleased to receive the intelligence that the Castle of Hermitage was in the possession of its rightful owner, his young friend Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan: but on the other hand the chivalrous Earl was vexed to think that his brave followers must now be led back to their own homes without having had an opportunity of displaying their prowess against the fierce Border warriors of the Earl of Douglas.

Fain would the Earl of Bassentyne have sped back at once to Roslin Castle to see the beautiful Margaret whom he loved so tenderly and well: but this inclination could not be immediately gratified—or according to the custom of his family he was bound to give a grand banquet in his own castle hall to the principal retainers who had gathered at his summons and marched forth beneath his banner to do him feudal service. Accordingly, back to Bassentyne Castle rode the Earl and his warriors. Some of the latter at once hurried off to their respective homes, that they might join their families with the least possible delay: but by far the greater number remained to avail themselves of the hospitalities of their feudal chieftain's halls. And munificently were those hospitalities vouchsafed: the banqueting tables groined beneath the weight of the provender that was served up—the red wine flowed profusely—and the minstrels poured forth their thrilling harmony. Until a late hour the festivity was maintained; and then the Earl of Bassentyne retired to his chamber, to dream of Margaret and to be cradled in the delightful visions which the genius of slumber conjured up to ravish—to enchant—and also, alas! to delude him!

On the following day the festivities were to be renewed; and according to custom there were to be games, gymnastic exercises, and displays of archery in the castle-grounds; for such from time immemorial had been the custom on the Bassentyne domain whenever the vassals and bondsmen had returned from field-service, whether only of a single day or of a lengthened period. Roland could not therefore depart from a usage which was traditional with the family to which he belonged: but he said to himself, as he arose from his couch in the morning, "The evening of this day will be old the termination of these scenes: and then to-morrow—to-morrow, away to Roslin to meet the well-beloved Margaret again!"

It is not our purpose to enter into any minute description of the merrymakings and festivities which were renewed on this particular day at Bas-

sentyne Castle. Suffice it to say that by means of the young Earl's liberality, his retainers were enabled to enjoy their accustomed sports on a scale which convinced them that there was no degeneracy in the munificence of the noble race to which their feudal service was owed. The towers and ramparts of the edifice echoed with the thrilling sounds of music; while ever and anon the full-plumed pipers sent the scream of their shrill instruments vibrating through the air.

It was on this day, while the sports and festivities were taking place at Bassentyne Castle, that the memorable interview occurred between Margaret and Stephen Cochrane in the armoury of Roslin, and which was to lead to a still more memorable interview between herself and the King in the evening. Margaret was ignorant—or else had lost the recollection of the traditionary custom which compelled the Earls of Bassentyne thus to entertain their vassals, serfs, and bondsmen, on a return from feudal service, no matter how short the period:—and thus being unaware of how Roland was engaged at his own castellated dwelling, she dreaded lest he should speedily make his appearance at Roslin. Hence, as the reader has seen, the small amount of hesitation with which she yielded to Stephen Cochrane's counsel by penning a letter addressed to the Earl, and entrusting this letter, as well as the ring which she had received from the young nobleman, to that same wily adviser, the royal page. But Cochrane, on his own part, knew perfectly well that there was little danger of the Earl of Bassentyne's arrival at Roslin Castle on that particular day, for the simple reason that he (the royal page) was aware of the custom of which we have above spoken; and therefore he knew how the young Earl would be engaged. Nevertheless, Stephen Cochrane had still a certain game to play in reference to Roland of Bassentyne; and the reader will soon learn how the royal page, in his astuteness and unprincipled spirit of intrigue, conducted his proceedings.

It was somewhat past the hour of noon—the sports and rejoicings at Bassentyne Castle were at their height, and the young Earl himself, elegantly appressed, was presiding as umpire at a grand archery match on the part of some of his principal retainers,—when a page presented a sealed packet, saying with a respectful bow, “May it please your lordship, this despatch has just been delivered by a messenger from Roslin Castle.”

“Indeed!” ejaculated Roland, as he glanced at the writing of the address with the idea that the missive had come from Margaret: but with a slight sense of disappointment, he said, “I recognise not the penmanship; and moreover the seal itself is a strange one!”

“May it please your lordship,” rejoined the page, “the despatch comes from Master Stephen Cochrane, the royal pursuivant, who requested Master Rodman, Lieutenant of Roslin Castle, to allow one of his men to ride hither that it might be duly delivered to your lordship.”

Roland now opened the despatch, the contents of which ran in the following strain:—

“Stephen Cochrane, Squire of the Royal Household, and Royal Pursuivant, to the most noble the Earl of Bassentyne, sends his humblest duty:—

“Forasmuch as the said Stephen Cochrane has received the Royal instructions to communicate with the Earl of Bassentyne upon a matter of importance and gravity, which his gracious Highness King David would fain entrust to the discretion, wisdom, and faithful furtherance of his right trusty and well-beloved the Earl of Bassentyne: therefore Stephen Cochrane, acting on behalf of his Royal Master, will to-morrow, at the

hour of noon precisely, present himself at Bassentyne Castle, to hold private discourse with the right honourable the Earl, touching and concerning the matter unto which allusion has been herein made. It is therefore hoped that whatsoever other engagements the Earl of Bassentyne may have formed (if any) will be set aside, that there may be no delay nor hindrance in respect to the proposed interview.”

Having read this despatch, the Earl of Bassentyne said to the page who delivered it, “Let the messenger from Roslin Castle be well cared for: then let him be dismissed with a piece of gold as a fee for his trouble, and with a message to worthy Master Stephen Cochrane that I hold myself in readiness to receive him to-morrow at the hour of noon according to the appointment which he has made.”

The Earl could not conjecture what private matter of weight and moment was to be entrusted to his zeal and discretion; but at the same time he was not particularly surprised at such a communication; for that was an age when monarchs were continually being led by whim, caprice, or other motives of sudden resolve, to confide off-hand certain missions or duties to particular noblemen who thus received only the briefest warning of whatsoever was expected at their hands. Belonging to the loyal party, Roland of Bassentyne was most ready and willing to serve his monarch; and though he felt honoured by the terms in which Cochrane's letter was penned, and which he believed to convey the sentiments of the Sovereign himself,—yet he could not help hoping that the mission or duty about to be entrusted to him might not prove one which would take him out of Scotland or remove him afar from Margaret.

The festivities and rejoicings at Bassentyne Castle were concluded with the presence of night: and when the Earl of Bassentyne sought his chamber, it was to speculate what the morrow might bring forth, as well as to slumber and dream of Margaret. When he awoke soon after daybreak, it was not—as on the previous morning he had flatteringly promised himself it would be—to repair to Roslin Castle and see the object of his love: but he was compelled to wait for the arrival of Stephen Cochrane. Ah! little suspected he how fearfully he had been deceived by the perfidious Margaret!—little thought he that in the evening of the night which was now over, she had knelt by another's side at the altar! Or little dreamt he that the ring which he—the fond, confiding Roland—had placed upon her finger as a token of betrothal, was no longer there! No—nothing of all this did he dream of! Indeed, how could he? He had the fullest faith in the love, the integrity, the constancy of Margaret; and he waited impatiently for the arrival of Stephen Cochrane in order that immediately after the interview he might mount his steed and gallop away to Roslin.

Punctually at the hour of noon, Stephen Cochrane arrived at Bassentyne Castle. He was completely unattended—he rode altogether alone; and he was appressed in a plain travelling-suit, which gave him the appearance of a respectable burgher. He was at once introduced into the presence of the Earl of Bassentyne, who received him with the consideration due to one of the confidential servants of royalty.

After the exchange of some few observations in respect to the recent events at Hermitage Castle, Stephen Cochrane said, “I will now, with your lordship's permission, enter upon the business which has brought me hither. You will not deem that I am suffering my tongue to make use of idle flattery or unwarranted compliment, when I declare that his

Most Gracious Highness the King regards your lordship as one of the most promising scions of the youthful nobility who serve as the props and defences of his throne. Especially the other evening, when you sought his Grace at Holyrood—being the bearer, if I recollect aright, of a letter from Sir Casimir D'Este—was the King pleased with your lordship's demeanour, style, and address. It would ill become me, so humble an individual, to enunciate these as my own opinions concerning your lordship's great and striking merits; and you will therefore be pleased to observe that they are the praises from his Majesty's own lips which I am reiterating."

"Every faithful baron who has sworn fealty to the royal House of Bruce—and every loyal subject," said the Earl of Bassentyne, "must feel proud at having obtained the good opinion of the Sovereign."

"And when a Monarch seeks to show special favour unto a particular personage," continued Stephen Cochrane, "he entrusts to that personage some task or duty which can only be confided to those whose wisdom, whose integrity, and whose discretion may be fully relied upon. So it is in the present case: and his Majesty calculates upon your lordship's zeal in immediately undertaking the business whereof I am about to speak, as well as upon your honour in maintaining all due silence and secrecy in respect to its nature."

"His Highness may rest assured," said Roland, "that his august confidence shall not be misplaced. Proceed, good Master Cochrane."

"I will not waste time, my lord, with unnecessary verbiage," resumed the royal page; "nor is it needful to use many words of preface in reminding your lordship of a fact which has hitherto existed to the disgrace and dishonour of Scotland. I allude to the circumstance that the holy rood, which an angel hand bestowed upon our Monarch's ancestor, was taken by the English at the battle of Nevill's Cross, and has since been retained by the fierce Southrons as a trophy of victory in their cathedral at Durham."

"This circumstance, alas! is known," said the Earl of Bassentyne, "throughout the length and breadth of the land."

"But there shall soon be rejoicing," resumed Cochrane, "where there has hitherto been sorrowing, on account of the silver cross. By virtue of certain secret negotiations between our royal David and the Court of England, the silver cross is to be surrendered—"

"Ah! say you so?" ejaculated Roland of Bassentyne: "these are indeed joyous tidings—and many a heart in Scotland will be glad—and many a leal and pious soul will rejoice at the restoration of the sacred emblem to the Abbey unto which in the origin it gave its name!"

"Your lordship exaggerates nothing," said Cochrane, "in the effects that must inevitably be produced by the recovery of the silver rood. But it is England's particular desire that the negotiation should be carried out secretly, and that some few months shall elapse ere it be made known that she hath surrendered up the sacred relic which she won at Nevill's Cross. For these and other reasons it is needful that the transaction should be conducted with delicacy; while immense will be the honour conferred upon the individual selected to repair to Durham and receive from the English bishop's hand the holy rood which has now for eighteen years been suspended in the cathedral of that diocese! And you, my Lord Earl of Bassentyne, are he whom the King has chosen thus to honour!"

Roland bowed in acknowledgment of the high compliment which Stephen Cochrane's words conveyed; and he intimated his readiness to do the King's behest in this as in all other things.

"His Gracious Majesty anticipated this declaration from your lordship's lips," said the page; "and now, therefore, in the Royal name I entreat that not a moment's unnecessary delay may occur ere your lordship sets off upon the expedition. It is to be conducted with all possible privacy. Your lordship must proceed to Durham without pomp or ceremony—attended but by a very few retainers—and studying to the utmost to avoid exciting a suspicion of what your object may be. Therefore, my lord, let your preparations be at once made. I am charged to accompany you to North Berwick, where a vessel lies in readiness."

"Do you mean, Master Cochrane," inquired the Earl of Bassentyne, "that I am to prepare to depart this day—this hour—without first repairing to Roslin Castle, and proffering my congratulations to my noble friend the Earl of Caithness on his restoration to his home?"

"I regret, my lord," said Cochrane, speaking somewhat coldly and severely, "that the King's service should so materially interfere with your private wishes and inclinations. But his Highness can no doubt entrust this most important mission to some other noble peer, who will duly estimate the honour, and who will not for a moment hesitate to put aside every other consideration in order to execute the King's bidding with alacrity. I regret that I should have intruded on your lordship's leisure, and I now say farewell,—simply requesting that all which has taken place betwixt your lordship and myself may be accounted as under the seal of an inviolable secrecy."

Thus speaking, the royal page rose from his seat, with the half mournful, half severe air of a man who looked as if he had been disappointed in the high estimation which he had formed of another. The young Earl was much hurt; his own pride was suddenly wounded—he saw that he had committed an oversight—he was therefore angry with himself; and he hastened to exclaim, "Deal not precipitately with me, good Master Cochrane!—and go not to represent me in an evil light to the King! I was wrong—"

"Not another word, my lord!" interjected Cochrane: "such an admission from the lips of a high and mighty peer as your lordship is, must be held as a sufficient atonement for a few words hastily or incautiously spoken! Your lordship will now make speed to accompany me;—and in reference to your friends at Roslin Castle, it will of course be an act of amenity and politeness to pen a few lines to the Earl of Caithness, to the effect that business of an urgent nature compels you to set out at once upon a journey, from which you shall however shortly return:—but what that business is, and whither that journey is to lead, your lordship's note need not specify."

The Earl of Bassentyne penned a brief letter to the Earl of Caithness, according to the terms which Stephen Cochrane had suggested; and as he folded it, he thought within himself, "My beloved Margaret will understand that this letter is rather intended for her own special information, than for any other purpose. She will see that I have not forgotten her,—and her mind will be tranquillized in respect to this suddenly undertaken journey! She has my ring as a token of my constancy; and I possess the ring which she bestowed upon me, and which shall never leave me!"

As the young nobleman thus mused, he carried to his lips the ring which Margaret had given him;

for he thought at the moment that Stephen Cochrane was looking in another direction. So indeed the royal page appeared to be doing: but in reality he was watching with earnestness every movement and proceeding, even the slightest and most trivial, on the Earl of Bassentyne's part; and he failed not therefore to notice the little incident of tenderness in respect to the ring.

The letter—duly sealed, and addressed to the Earl of Caithness—was sent off to Roslin Castle. The Earl of Bassentyne now selected four of his personal retainers on whom he thought that the utmost reliance could be placed; and he bade them make immediate preparations to accompany him on a journey. The mandate was soon fulfilled; and at about two o'clock in the afternoon the little party—consisting of Roland, his four servitors, and Stephen Cochrane, all well mounted—issued from the portals of Bassentyne Castle.

A ride of some five-and-twenty miles brought the travellers to North Berwick,—where, as Cochrane had intimated, a vessel was in readiness to receive the Earl of Bassentyne and his followers. It was about five o'clock in the evening when the embarkation took place;—and now Stephen Cochrane, standing upon the deck of the vessel, was about to bid farewell to the young nobleman.

"My lord," he said, placing a sealed packet in Roland's hand, "here are your instructions as well as your credentials. You will not open the packet until you arrive at Durham. Such is our royal master's command."

"And it shall be obeyed," replied the Earl. "Have you aught further to communicate, Master Cochrane?"

"Nothing, my lord. I have now only my humble duty to present, and to wish you a fair and happy voyage—of which indeed there is every prospect; for the weather is beautiful and this breeze comes from a favourable quarter. Farewell, my lord."

"Farewell, good Master Cochrane:"—and the nobleman courteously acknowledged the royal page's respectful salutation.

Stephen Cochrane moved towards the gangway, where the captain of the little bark was stationed to receive any parting instructions which he might have to give.

"Well do I desire you a prosperous voyage, Captain M'Cormick," said Cochrane, aloud: then suddenly lowering his voice almost to a whisper, but speaking with impressive accents—and at the same time darting a significant look upon the vessel's commander—he added, "The ring, M'Cormick!—let me have the ring, at peril of your life!"

Equally significant was the look which the captain flung upon Stephen Cochrane in return; and this rapid interchange of meaning glances passed altogether unperceived by all the others on the deck of that vessel. The royal page sprang upon the rude quay which then served as a landing-place; and he courteously raised his plumed cap in token of final adieu to the young nobleman, as M'Cormick issued the order to let go the ropes which held the vessel to the wharf. The sails were quickly hoisted: they fluttered for a few moments ere they caught the favouring breeze—then they filled to that gentle but auspicious gale—and the bark stood out upon the bosom of the noble estuary.

It was a small, but compact and well-built vessel, with two masts, and manned by a crew of six sailors, including the captain himself. The Earl of Bassentyne, having acknowledged Cochrane's farewell salutation, paced towards the prow of the bark, in order that the sails might not bar his view of the gloomily towering Tantallon Castle on the right hand, and the wildly romantic Bass Rock, also with

its looming range of fortalice, on the left hand. It was one of those few days to which we have referred in the preceding chapter, when the water was calm, and when it merely rippled around the promontory of Tantallon or at the foot of the stark cliffs of the Bass Rock, instead of surging in mighty waves or beating in terrific billows against those eminences. Thus there was now a certain degree of beauty mingling with the sublimity of the scene, and a picturesque tranquillity toning down the awfulness of the picture. Overhead the blue sky was flaked with vapoury wreaths; for as it was the beginning of the summer season—namely, towards the close of the month of May—the sunset was yet some little while distant, and the beams of the orb of day illumined the entire scene of calmly sleeping ocean and grimly rising land.

All the incidents connected with the Earl of Bassentyne's departure from his own castle—his journey to North Berwick—and his embarkation on board the vessel, had hurried one upon another in such rapid succession, that he had hitherto scarcely found time to bestow a deliberate thought upon the whole proceeding. It was now natural, therefore, that he should begin to reflect thereupon. Himself high-minded, frank-hearted, and confiding—with all the unimpaired freshness of youth in his disposition, though having attained manhood's discretionary age of about five-and-twenty—Roland of Bassentyne was one of the last men in existence to harbour suspicion without adequate cause. And indeed it was now without any positive mistrust that he began to fancy that there were some little peculiarities of circumstance connected with all that had occurred within the last few hours. Was it not a somewhat strange way of confiding to him so important a mission, that the King should not have done it in person?—that he should not have summoned Roland to Edinburgh to receive the royal mandates direct from the royal lips?—but that the task should have been entrusted to a page? It was not even a Minister, nor a high official of the Court, who had conducted the business; nor was there so much as an autograph letter from the monarch who required that the transaction should be executed with so much delicate caution and diplomatic secrecy. But on the other hand, the whole affair had a genuine aspect. Stephen Cochrane was supposed, or even known, to be more deeply in the King's secrets than most of the Court officials; all due compliments had been conveyed on the Monarch's behalf to the Earl;—and then too it was to be borne in mind that David disliked unnecessary trouble, and that for this very reason he often had a peculiar way of conducting his proceedings. Besides, there was the sealed packet containing alike credentials and private instructions; and there was nothing singular in the fact that Roland was enjoined not to break the seal until he should set foot in the city of Durham. Thus, if on the one hand, the Earl in giving way to his reflections was at first struck by some little apparent inconsistencies in the initiatory circumstances of his present enterprise, they did not amount to the strength of suspicion nor inspire him with misgivings; while, on the other hand, a little additional study of the whole affair was completely reassuring in its results.

Roland of Bassentyne was not however long permitted to indulge in his meditations without interruption; for scarcely had a quarter of an hour elapsed when Captain M'Cormick, who had been below in the cabin, suddenly came up with a look that elicited ejaculations of alarm from some of his seamen. He was instantaneously questioned by the Earl's retainer who stood by; and Roland himself, perceiving there was something wrong, quickly

retraced his steps from the forepart of the vessel. Some of the sailors were hastily sent below: the others, assisted by the captain, speedily set to work to trim the sails in such a manner as to alter the vessel's course; while the helmsman so performed his own part that the bark began to bear in towards the front of the Bass Rock.

"Is there anything amiss?" demanded the Earl of Bassentyne, in a voice which showed his determination to elicit a response; for the questions hitherto put by his followers had remained unanswered.

"One does not like to be in a hurry, my lord," replied the captain, "to communicate evil tidings—Besides the bustle and confusion——"

"Then something evil *has* occurred?" ejaculated the Earl. "What is it?"

"The vessel has sprung a leak, my lord—and we must put in to the Rock. It is fortunate that the sea is calm——"

"A leak!" ejaculated the Earl's retainers, as if all speaking in one voice; and brave as brave could be though they were when daring the perils of the land, yet those of the ocean made their cheeks blanch.

"Fear not!" cried the captain. "I think we shall yet save ourselves! What ho, my men!" he shouted out to the seamen below: "how say you?—does the water gain upon us?"

"Apace, sir," was the response. "But we are doing our best!—there may be yet ten minutes good!"

"Enough!" exclaimed the captain: "five will answer our purpose!"

"At least let me render assistance!" exclaimed the Earl: and he was about to spring down into the cabin.

"Hold, my lord!" cried the captain, clutching him by the arm: "be pleased to remain on deck!—there is no room below—and my men suffice for whatsoever work there is to be done! See! our gallant vessel makes its way nobly! To helm and sail is she alike obedient!"

The Earl of Bassentyne accordingly remained tranquil on deck; and the calm composure of his countenance reassured his followers.

"I fear, my lord," said the captain, "you will have to pass the night at the Bass Rock Castle. But boats are to be had there; and if my own bark should go down—as I fear will be the case—we will procure another ship from Berwick by the morning. It is but a delay of a few hours!"

"An accident, Master McCormick, for which you are in no way responsible," replied the Earl, "and which must be borne philosophically. But inescapably that your vessel bears herself better than might have been anticipated; because for the life of me I cannot see that we are a single inch lower in the water at this present moment than when we were starting from Berwick!"

"Ah, my lord," answered the captain curtly, "but the eve of a landsman is different from that of a mariner. Hah! now we are safe! In for the landing!"

The vessel had been swiftly pursuing its way towards the front of the Bass Rock, all along the ledge of which the ramparts and towers of the massive fortalice frowned gloomily; and in the perspective the acclivitous table-surface of the little island was seen as a huge uprisng background, the whole standing out in bold relief against the horizon of the German Ocean. The water was deep all around: there was no running ashore—no stranding of the vessel—but simply the act of bringing her in broadside against the landing-place; and this was done with all the skill of good seamanship—

and to the idea of the Earl of Bassentyne, just precisely as if the bark still floated as buoyantly as she did before the leak was proclaimed.

There was a sort of opening amidst the rugged jutting crags forming the front of the precipice; and there two or three soldiers of the garrison were seen apparently ready to lend any assistance that might be required. What was the matter? Such was the question put by the soldiers. A leak had been sprung, and there was danger of the vessel's sinking. Such was the answer quickly given by McCormick. Sympathetic ejaculations echoed from the landing-place, followed by assurances of every hospitality.

"Now, my lord," said McCormick, "be so good as to land with your followers. The captain and his men are the last to leave the sinking ship! What ho! one or two of you! get ready his lordship's mail-trunks for landing!"

The Earl of Bassentyne accordingly stepped forth from the deck of the vessel, followed by his four retainers. It was upon a small flat surface of rock that they thus entered; and as they advanced a few paces they found that there was a steep ascent which widened somewhat. Here they were suddenly surrounded by a posse of soldiers lying in ambush for the purpose. The conviction of treachery flashed to the minds of the nobleman and his servitors: but it was too late—resistance was impossible—they were overpowered in the twinkling of an eye—their weapons were taken from them—and they found themselves captives!

CHAPTER XXX.

QUEEN, AND NO QUEEN.

THE treatment which the Earl of Caithness had experienced at the hands of the fierce Borderers, and subsequently at those of the Black Douglas, during the brief period that he was in their power, was of a description which he could scarcely think or speak of without feeling his blood boil in his veins.

First of all, on being carried off from the neighbourhood of his own castle, his signet-ring was violently taken from his finger by Magnus Baveny, in order that it might be consigned to Father Julius as a means of forwarding the plot in which that treacherous monk had engaged for the abduction of the Lady Albertina. On arriving at Hermitage Castle the Earl of Caithness soon found that the treatment which he might expect, all depended upon the readiness he displayed in falling into the views of the Black Douglas. When the two Earls stood in each other's presence—the one as a captive, the other as the arbiter of his fate—the calm dignity of the former contrasted most nobly with the fierce brutality of the latter. With the becoming pride of a Scottish peer, a Knight, and a gentleman, did the Earl of Caithness disdainfully repel the bare idea which was involved by the proposals made to him, to the effect that he was capable of purchasing his own life and liberty by perfidious conduct towards Fleming Fitz-Allan. For the Earl of Douglas demanded on the part of Lord Caithness a renunciation of all powers as executor of the late Knight of Liddesdale,—the renunciation likewise on the part of Fleming Fitz-Allan of all claim to the estates bequeathed by that departed Knight. The Earl of Caithness refused to make any such ignoble compromise on his own account, or to solicit from Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan the faintest concession of his own special rights and interests. The Earl of Douglas gave



Lord Caithness some brief interval to reflect upon his decision; but this course was in reality unnecessary, for that decision was already taken, and it was irrevocable on the part of a man of such strict honour and probity as the Earl of Caithness. Thus, at a second interview between the two noblemen, Lord Caithness answered only as before; and Lord Douglas, furious with rage, consigned him to the depths of that fearful dungeon in which the unfortunate Sir Alexander Ramsay had been starved to death some years back by the Knight of Liddesdale. From that subterranean prison-house the Earl of Caithness was soon released by Sir Casimir D'Este and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan; and if he did not insist upon some terrible vengeance being wreaked upon the Black Douglas, it was because his humane heart shrank from the idea of shedding human blood otherwise than in the battle-fray.

"I might have taken his life in expiation for the outrage I experienced at his hands," said the Earl of Caithness, when subsequently talking over the matter in his own family circle at Roslin; "and every law would have justified me in ordering my retainers to hang the false Earl upon the highest tower of Hermitage; but humanity prompted me to spare him! Besides, his punishment was greater—for he had to endure all the humiliation of defeat, and all the mortification of beholding the utter discomfiture of his plans. Yes—it must have been a fearfully galling thing for the Black Douglas to surrender up all his alleged claims to the estates of his deceased kinsman, and to know that his troops were disbanded—some to proclaim their allegiance to the new lord of Hermitage, the brave Fleming—and others to return to their own homes under a solemn vow never again to bear arms in antagonism to myself or Fleming. Yes—this must have been terribly mortifying for the Black Douglas:—but still it was not all! There was the plaint of the Lady Elvira Ramsay against him: with horror did I listen to her tale—and in my indignation I vowed that the Earl of Douglas should appear before his King to answer the accusations. So I held the villanous nobleman to a bond and guarantee for such appearance; and deeper still was the humiliation of the Douglas when he was compelled to sign the deed which placed his Barony of North Berwick in a state of forfeiture if on the thirtieth day from that date he should fail to appear before the King at whatsoever place his Majesty might appoint to hear the plaint of the injured Elvira Ramsay. Ah! assuredly all these humiliations and mortifications were a sufficient punishment for the haughty Earl of Douglas,—especially as his impetuous spirit, ever chafing even at the veriest trifle, must feel all the more severely such stern and serious calamities! But even as it is, he has not yet passed completely through the ordeal of humiliations: for either must he in due course appear before his King at the instance of the Lady Elvira Ramsay—or he must submit to the forfeiture of the fairest portion of his domains. Perhaps, therefore, the various sources of punishment which he is already enduring and may yet have to endure, as the fruits of his several misdeeds, constitute a more fearful expiation than if his career had been in a single moment cut short by the hangman's halter or the headsman's stroke—or than if he were now chafing in the dampness, and darkness, and amidst the horrible associations of a dungeon beneath the foundations of Hermitage!"

It was in some such strain as this that the Earl of Caithness spoke to Albertina and Margaret, when, soon after his return to Roslin, he had leisure to enter into a minute account of all that had

passed during his absence:—and as the reader is now enlightened on that head, we may resume the thread of our tale.

When Margaret appeared at the breakfast-table on the morning after the bridal night, her countenance was serene as usual, and there was nothing in her look to betray to those about her that anything extraordinary had taken place, or to excite a suspicion to that effect. Even Sir Casimir D'Este, habitually shrewd and keen-eyed though he were, was on this occasion at fault: or rather we would say that not for a single moment did the idea enter his mind that Margaret's bosom cherished a tremendous secret which it required all her self-possession and power of mental control to enable her thus to keep beyond the chance of betrayal.

The King dared not remain any longer within the walls of Roslin: he had therefore left at an early hour that morning, in the garb of a man-at-arms,—the same disguise by virtue of which, thanks to Lieutenant Redman's connivance, he had obtained admittance within the walls of the fortalice on the preceding evening ere the drawbridge had been raised and the portcullis lowered. But King David had not taken his departure without making many promises to Margaret, nor yet without arranging a means by which she might at any time correspond with him safely and secretly.

In the forenoon, between ten and eleven o'clock, Margaret contrived to obtain a few moments' private interview with Stephen Cochrane, whose demeanour towards her was that of the profoundest deference and respect.

"I am about to leave the castle, most gracious lady," said the royal page: "for precisely at midday I am to be with the Earl of Bassentyne."

Margaret started and coloured: but instantaneously recovering her composure, she said with the dignity of one who felt herself to be a Queen and that she might therefore defy everything connected with her subjects, "I trust to you, my faithful Cochrane, so to conduct matters that I shall experience no molestation on the part of that nobleman, if the letter which I yesterday penned should fail to produce all the desired effect."

"Trust to me, gracious lady," responded the royal page, "to make that matter straight and pleasant, so far as your Highness is concerned."

"At the same time, Cochrane," she said,—“at the same time,” she somewhat nervously repeated, “I would not have injury inflicted upon the Earl of Bassentyne—”

"Assuredly not, my lady!" interjected Cochrane. "But I beseech your Grace to confide entirely in me—"

"I have already done so—and you have behaved faithfully. I will do so again! But forget not that the ring which I bestowed upon Roland of Bassentyne—"

"That ring shall be restored to your Highness," rejoined Cochrane. "Rest assured that my pledge shall be kept!"

The royal page then bowed profoundly, and hurried from the apartment where this colloquy took place. As the reader has seen in the preceding chapter, he punctually kept the appointment which he had given to the Earl of Bassentyne; and he treacherously took the most effective measures, not merely to possess himself of the ring which Margaret had given to the young Earl, but also to ensure Margaret herself against any molestation on the part of the unfortunate young nobleman whom she had made her dupe and whom circumstances were now rendering her victim. In the afternoon of that same day came the young Earl's letter to Lord Caithness,—to the effect that circumstances

which had transpired with a most unexpected suddenness, compelled him to depart on an immediate journey, and that he therefore hoped he should be held absolved of any discourtesy, unkindness, or disrespect, in not first of all hastening to Roslin to pay his devoirs to all his friends beneath that roof.

"It is strange," said the Earl of Caithness, "that Roland gives us not the slightest hint relative to the object of his journey nor its destination. But doubtless he has good reasons of his own for this apparent reserve—and all will be satisfactorily cleared up in due time."

Thus spoke the Earl of Caithness: but Margaret was somewhat affected by the circumstance of the arrival of that letter. Utterly ignorant of all Cochran's designing conduct, and the various duplicities which were entering into the part that he was playing, she thought that it was her own letter to Roland of Bassentyne which had elicited this one addressed to the Earl of Caithness. Not for a moment could she suspect that the letter which she had so written to the young Earl, and which was accompanied by the ring he had given her—not for a moment, we say, did she suspect that this letter of her's had never been delivered to him at all, and that the ring had not been restored, but that both still remained in the possession of Stephen Cochrane! Believing, therefore, that her own letter had been duly delivered, and that Roland's ring had been restored to him, she could not now for a moment help sighing, and even experiencing a remorseful sensation at the heart, as she thought within herself, "Generous Roland! he yields to my entreaty—he gives me back my vows—he absolves me from my pledge—he sacrifices his own heart's feelings on my account—and he writes to the Earl of Caithness that the letter may be read or shown to me, and that I may understand its meaning! Ah, that meaning is clear enough! He is about to set forth upon a journey—he says not whither, nor how long his absence is to last; and he specifies no cause! But I understand it all! It is as much as to say, 'Margaret, you shall be obeyed; I will come near you no more; and as a proof as well as a token of my sincerity, I leave the neighbourhood!'—Poor Roland! would that he might have been spared all this unhappiness, and yet that all the same I might have risen to my own present greatness."

Such was the nature of Margaret's reflections: but if for a moment her heart were touched on the Earl of Bassentyne's account, yet this little twinge of remorse speedily subsided when with thrilling veins, and glowing bosom, and animated countenance she murmured to herself, "Oh, but all and everything must have been sacrificed in order that I should become a Queen!"

In the evening of the following day Lieutenant Redman availed himself of an opportunity to slip stealthily a very small packet into the hand of Margaret; and when she retired to her chamber, she found that this packet contained the ring which she had presented to Roland of Bassentyne, and which she had so earnestly charged Stephen Cochrane to recover for her. The ring was enveloped in a slip of parchment, on which these words were written—"To her Gracious Highness Queen Margaret, with the humble duty of her Majesty's most faithful servant, Stephen Cochrane."

Highness! Grace! Majesty!—by all these swelling titles had Margaret already been addressed—but only by *one* person! and that person was Stephen Cochrane. True, Redman knew that she was a Queen, and treated her with the profoundest veneration: but he spoke not to her at all—doubtless because he dared not refrain from giving her a suit-

able title if he did address her, while on the other hand he was afraid of being overheard, and he seemed to know that the secret must at present be religiously maintained. That slip of paper the contents of which were couched in such obsequious terms, made Margaret's heart dilate proudly and her pulses beat thrillingly for a few moments: but then the reaction came—and it was even with violence that this thought struck her as if it were a blow,—
"A Queen, but not a Queen!"

She sat down in her chamber to reflect on all the circumstances and details which were comprised in that brief thought.

"I am a wife: why should I not be acknowledged as one? I am a Queen: why should I not receive the homage due to one? My royal husband bade me wait until he could prepare his Ministers, the Court dignitaries, and his great nobles, to receive the announcement—until, in short, he should have had leisure to hint something to one, and whisper in the ear of another, and entrust the secret entirely and completely to another, and so on. Yes!—and I promised to be a docile and obedient wife—and I must wait—I must have patience! Still it is hard—But no! no! I must hush these repinings! I will not give way to them!"

Margaret accordingly summoned her maidens from the ante-chamber; and while they assisted at her night-toilet, she chatted gaily with them, in order to divert her own thoughts into another and more cheerful channel.

Three or four days passed—and during this interval Margaret received two tender billets from the King, forwarded through the medium of Redman. Both were couched in the most affectionate terms—both declared how painful their separation was to the Monarch's mind; and the latter billet promised that within a very few days he would devise some pretext for paying a visit to Roslin, and even passing a short time there.

A couple more days elapsed—and on the following morning everybody within the walls of Roslin Castle was astir betimes, because this was the day on which a certain ceremony was to take place. Indeed it was the anniversary of a custom which had long been maintained at Roslin Castle. A few words of explanation will suffice. Those tenants who held lands on the Roslin domain at a money-rental, were on this day to liquidate their year's liability; while those who held lands on consideration of the surrender of a certain portion of their produce, were expected to attend at the castle to give an account of their crops. Again, those who held cottages and gardens on consideration of giving so many days' labour to the Earl's own estate in the course of each year, were accustomed to compare their tallies with the steward's book and satisfy this functionary that their portion of the compact had been fulfilled. All the serfs and bondsmen on the domain were likewise expected to attend at Roslin, so that their feudal lord might have an opportunity of ascertaining the past services of each, and deciding upon whom the boon of emancipation should be bestowed. In a word, the occasion partook of the character of a rent-day and tithing-meeting; and therefore all was bustle within the walls of Roslin.

From an early hour in the morning the inhabitants of the spacious domain of Roslin began to arrive at the castle. There were Knights, owing feudal service—substantial farmers, occupying large holdings—petty shopkeepers from villages—well-to-do millers and brewers—malsters and publicans—graziers and cotiers. There were likewise forest-keepers and woodmen, coming to make their reports; and there were all the various denomina-

tions of the inferior order—shepherds, gardeners, labourers, and so forth. It was a tide of population which poured over the stone bridge; and as the hospitalities of Roslin were always munificently displayed upon these occasions, and the generous Earl himself loved to ensure and contemplate the happiness of all who were dependent upon him, he freely permitted the men to be accompanied by their wives and children if they thought fit. In short, it was as complete a holiday and as complete a scene of banqueting, festivity, and rejoicing as on the day when the Earl of Caithness returned to his ancestral home after a seven years' exile on the Continent.

When Albertina and Margaret accompanied the Earl and Sir Casimir D'Este in their ramble through the pleasure-grounds, to behold the assemblage of revellers and the progress of the festivities, from many a lip were heard such expressions as these:—"Look! that fair-haired young damsel is the Lady Albertina!—and that dark-haired one is Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan!"

Ejaculations of this kind were often and often repeated, until Margaret's heart almost swelled with indignation at the thought that she was debarred from suddenly addressing the assemblage and exclaiming, "You place me below the Lady Albertina Roslin: but know that I am infinitely above her—Yes, and above every other lady in the land—for I am your Queen!"

The day passed—the evening came—the crowds had melted away from Roslin Castle: silence succeeded the bustle and activity which had for so many hours prevailed. The time for retiring arrived; and Margaret proceeded to her own chamber. But restless thoughts were in her mind: she knew that if she sought her couch she could not immediately sleep: she therefore dismissed her handmaids on some pretext—and she gave way to her reflections. But these only grew more agitated,—until at length, under the impulse of a sudden idea, she started from her seat, snatched up the lamp, and stole forth from her chamber. All was still and silent in the passage: all seemed still and silent throughout the castle. Margaret bent her steps to the armoury, where she knew there were writing materials, which she did not happen to possess in her own chamber. She seated herself at the table; and taking up a pen, began to indite a letter of urgent appeal and entreaty unto the King.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ARMOURY.

It was in a morbid condition of mind that Margaret had thus sought the armoury for the purpose of addressing an epistle to the King. She was impatient to be acknowledged as a wife and as a queen: she could not bear that those around her should continue to speak of her as plain Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan, and to place her beneath Lady Albertina Roslin. Margaret was inordinately ambitious:—it was to her ambition that she had sacrificed the young Earl of Bassentyne—for her ambition's sake there was scarcely any sacrifice which she was not prepared to accomplish; and it was only natural that such a disposition should long to enjoy all the advantages which she had aspired to attain. She wished to be recognised as Scotland's Queen—to exercise the sway belonging to that proud position—to fulfil the duties and enjoy the privileges of regal rank—to hear herself

addressed by the swelling titles of Grace, Highness, and Majesty—to receive the homage of courtiers—and to become the sharer of a throne with the royal David. Thus her impatient spirit could not brook delay: her very pride itself experienced a deep mortification by being compelled to keep as a secret that which she longed to proclaim to all the world; and she even began to fancy that she was being treated unkindly and ungenerously by the King in being left unacknowledged—a wife, and no wife—at Roslin Castle. Thus, for numerous reasons, and under the influence of various sentiments and emotions, Margaret was resolved to make an appeal to the King that he would at once acknowledge her as his Queen, and elevate her without delay from the false position in which she found herself to be placed.

As we have already said, Redman was accustomed to keep his accounts in the armoury. In his capacity of lieutenant of the castle—that is to say, as military governor under the superior authority of the Earl of Caithness—Redman exercised jurisdiction over everything which regarded the safety of the fortress: it was his duty to keep an account of all the materials of warfare which in case of necessity could be brought into requisition; and thus was it that some little clerical experience was required in the department of the lieutenant Redman, as well as in that of the steward Hepburn. Hence the reader may comprehend how it was that Redman was accustomed to keep writing materials in the armoury—a circumstance of which Margaret now purposed to avail herself.

As in all baronial castles of that period, the armoury at Roslin was a spacious apartment—or rather we should say, a long gallery—filled with offensive and defensive weapons of all descriptions. There was however no confusion nor disorder apparent in the place: the arrangement and distribution of the warlike materials were upon a plan of the most perfect discipline. Indeed many of the weapons were fancifully arranged so as to serve as ornaments: broadswords and gauntlets hung over shields—spears and sabres were disposed so as to form quaint devices—and from the groined roof hung down numerous pennons and banners, all associated with some grand deeds or memorable legends connected with the Roslin family. But the most striking objects in the gallery were the suits of complete armour standing upon pedestals, and so disposed as to have life-like attitudes. Redman was most particular in the care which he bestowed upon the armoury; and he himself superintended the attitudes and postures which were given to the panoplies when restored to their pedestals after having been removed therefrom to be burnished up or to be used for hostile purposes. Thus a stranger, on entering that armoury for the first time, might really have supposed that it was an array of living warriors which greeted the eye on either side,—some resting upon their swords—others leaning upon their spears—some carrying lances whose pennons fluttered to any current of air that might happen to float through the gallery—some looking as if engaged in conversation—others seeming as if about to rush into the fight—others, again, appearing to be aware of some approaching danger and standing on their guard ready to encounter it,—but all having more or less the semblance of life and animation, and looking like an assemblage of veritable warriors, all with their visors closed, instead of an array of mere hollow, empty panoplies.

And there too might be seen every description of armour known in the age of which we are writing—suits composed of shirts of mail, with helmets,

gauntlets, and leg-pieces of steel—other suits wherein chain and plate armour were blended—and other suits composed entirely of shining steel. These last were of the most recent invention, the most exquisite in manufacture, and therefore the most costly. But even in such panoplies as these, there was a great variety; for some were uncouth in their arrangements, clumsy, ponderous, and unnecessarily massive—while others were light, elegant, and with not an unnecessary atom of metal about them. There might be seen the well-shaped round helmets, with their vizors perforated with holes or else cut into bars: there also might be seen the huge antique burgonets that were flat at the top, and with straight aventayles sliding up and down like the mouth of a trap. There also might be observed light and elegant suits of armour for females,—the corselets so fashioned as to afford room for the bosom, the contours of which were thus fully defined by the steel panoply. In a word, the visitor who at the period of which we are writing penetrated into the armoury of Roslin Castle, would behold the most interesting specimens of the armourer's art, and could not fail to be struck by the tasteful manner in which shields, targets, and offensive weapons were disposed against the massive pillars or upon the walls—as well as the life-like attitude and postures given to the suits of armour and martial panoplies, each on its respective pedestal.

Having thus spoken of the general aspect of the armoury at Roslin Castle, we will now resume the thread of our narrative. It was there, at about eleven o'clock at night, that Margaret took her seat at the table, and began penning a letter to the King. Yielding to the impetuous influence of her feelings, she was couching her epistle in language that was alike passionate and pathetic; and as her ideas flowed faster than her pen could commit them to paper, she wrote on for some minutes without being compelled to pause for reflection. At length however she lifted her pen from the paper: there was thus a relaxation from the hitherto total absorption of her interest and attention in the task which she had in hand; and at that instant it struck her that she heard a slight movement somewhere behind the chair in which she was sitting. She glanced hastily round towards the door of the armoury; but all was still. On her right hand, immediately behind her, stationed against one of the pillars of the arched entrance, stood a suit of armour, seeming like the effigy of a warrior holding in his hand a lance to the point of which a pennon was attached: while behind her on her left hand, stood a tall panoply of beautifully modelled steel, the skirt only being composed of mail. This panoply looked like a warrior resting one arm on an immense two-handed sword, the point of which touched his feet; while his right arm was bent in a sort of *nonchalant* way, so that the hand rested upon his hip. Margaret glanced rapidly round towards both the figures which we have thus briefly described: motionless as statues were they; and ashamed of her transient apprehension, she turned her eyes upon the paper once more.

She wrote down a few more sentences: then she paused—she fancied she was wording her letter too strongly—that she was exhibiting too much impatience—and that instead of fulfilling her pledge to be a docile and obedient wife, she was displaying a rebellious spirit at the expiration of only eight days since she had knelt with David in front of the altar. In a word, the sounder portion of Margaret's judgment was now coming to her aid: the natural caution of her disposition was asserting its empire over the fiery and impetuous phases of her soul.

She laid down her pen and began to reflect. Mechanically her eyes settled upon a suit of armour intended for female use and which stood at a short distance on the right hand. The visor was closed, as were all the aventayles in the gallery; but the attitude of the effigy was such that it seemed as if that helmet, slightly inclining forward, contained a head whose eyes were actually riveted upon Margaret. Such was the idea for a moment produced by the posture of that suit of armour; and Margaret continued to gaze upon it until she felt as if a cold fascinating sensation was creeping over her,—as if she were under the influence of a reptile's gaze! But ah! was it only imagination? or was there something more than mere fancy in the idea that a pair of human eyes flashed forth their regards through the bars of that helmet upon her?

The thought had not come suddenly, or else she would have started up and screamed out: but it was an impression that had gradually been growing upon her, as it were, for the last few moments,—at first appearing to be a mere wandering of the fancy, until at length assuming the character of an absolute reality. She did not move—she did not cry out: no sound escaped her lips: she was fascinated with a cold horror—transfixed with terror. She felt that her features were rigid; but yet they changed not to the view; so that the eyes which were looking down upon her might have fancied that she was still absorbed in meditation only, as she was when she first laid down her pen, and that terror had nothing to do with her posture or her mien.

Strong minded though Margaret were, it was by no means astonishing that she should have thus for more than a minute sat petrified with horror, gaping upon the steel panoply from the barred visor of which came the regards that fascinated her as if with a reptile glance; for first a feeling of superstitious awe came upon her—and then an idea of human treachery succeeded the other impression. But her fortitude was soon coming back to her aid: she felt the coldness of terror diminishing—her limbs were gradually experiencing relief from the paralyzing influence that enthralled them—her ideas grew settled—there was clearness in her brain. Now, was it a fact which had alarmed her?—or a fancy to be accounted for by some natural means, such for instance as the reflection of the lamp acting differently in respect to that particular suit of armour than it did with regard to the rest? She looked towards the next panoply: but, ah! was it possible?—the same circumstance, whether fact or reality! Yes—the beams of that lamp were reflected in another pair of eyes, the keen glances of which were looking down through the bars of the visor!

Now indeed it was a miracle that Margaret did not start up from her seat and spring towards the door shrieking for assistance. But no!—a wondrous courage inspired her at that moment—we might almost say that a marvellous fortitude seized upon her; so that she took up her pen, bent her eyes upon the paper, and pretended to be writing again. Yet though her self-possession enabled her to do this—thereby acting as if she had in reality seen nothing to alarm her, nor even to engender the slightest suspicion that anything was wrong—still was she under the influence of an awful consternation. There was no doubt that two of those steel panoplies contained human forms; for Margaret was too sensible and clear minded to revert to the superstitious idea which had seized upon her for an instant—and for an instant only. Two persons in that armoury, concealed in suits of armour! Who were they? Spies—or brigands—or other mischief-meaning persons? But Ah! how knew she that there were *only* two? Were there not between

twenty and thirty complete panoplies in that armoury, standing upon as many pedestals? For a moment Margaret was on the point of flinging her glances around in a perfect exorciation of affright: but she yielded not to the impulse of her passing horror—she was again smitten with a tremendous sense of the importance of acting with due care and caution; and she summoned all her fortitude to her aid.

Now, while affecting to be again giving way to her meditations in respect to what she was writing, she laid down her pen; and she assumed that posture which is so common a one in the midst of profound thoughtfulness, when the elbow rests upon the table and the chin rests upon the hand. The countenance thus looking straightforward, commands a wide expanse of view, as the eyes may fling their glances to the right, to the left, above and below, with rapidity and facility. Thus Margaret—while now seeming to be looking only upon vacancy and to be completely absorbed with inward contemplation—made her regards travel along the array of suits of armour on the right hand towards the extremity of the gallery—then back along the array of panoplies on her left hand; and as her looks thus wandered from effigy to effigy, the awful—the appalling conviction grew stronger and stronger in her mind that the armoury was peopled with living beings, and that every suit of armour contained an individual! For though in many instances she could not catch the gleaming of human eyes within the barred helmets, yet might she arrive at a certainty by means of other indications that her horrible conjecture was but too well founded. For by watching any one of those suits of armour for a few moments—by riveting the eyes upon each in succession—it became unmistakably apparent that there was the principle of movement in every one of them. Here the arm which rested upon a sword, contracted or elongated itself, visibly though slightly: there a shield the lower point of which at one moment just touched the middle of the steel knee-joint, was the next instant a little higher or a little lower: there a lance, held perpendicularly, swayed a little to the right or a little to the left, as could be judged by the shadow thrown against some fixed mark on the wall behind. In short, the conviction was now in Margaret's mind that every panoply contained its man—every suit of armour encased a human being: a heart beat under every corselet—eyes were flashing within every helmet—and in every gauntlet there was a hand capable of direst mischief, perhaps of murder itself!

What did it all mean? who could the concealed villains be? Margaret, remembering the bustle and festivities of the day, and the crowds of persons who in the course of a dozen hours had visited Roslin, saw in a moment how easy it might have been for some twenty or thirty treacherously disposed individuals to glide one by one at short intervals to the armoury and conceal themselves for vile purposes in the suits of armour. But again recurred the question—Who could they be? Was it astonishing that after so much experience of the treacherous capabilities of the Earl of Douglas, Margaret's thoughts should at once settle upon that personage?—indeed was it not natural that recent events should prove suggestive of the idea that some dark and horrible treachery was now being meditated from that same quarter? Yes—there could be no doubt of it!

But what was Margaret to do? If she raised her voice and shrieked for assistance, the sound would not penetrate beyond the massive walls and portals of the armoury:—if she attempted to leave the

place, either one of those panoplies might suddenly become imbued with a still more active vitality—she might be seized upon—or she might be stricken down by the lance grasped by the warrior on her right hand, or by the fearful two-handed sword on which leant the arm of the warrior on her left hand. She must not therefore seek to fly: but would it not be equally to encounter certain death if she were to remain? or at least to fall into the hands of those desperadoes?—whereas she must adopt some measure—Oh! yes, she must take some course to foil their designs, to baffle their projects, and to counteract whatever dangers their ominous presence might portend!

The terrible sense of hideous peril—not merely peril to herself, but peril to all others in the castle—gave a marvellous keenness to the intelligence of Margaret: she suddenly found herself gifted with a power of penetrating motives and fathoming designs which surprised herself. Indeed there was a fearful clearness in her mind, such as that which the scaring startling lightning throws into a cavern, illumining all objects that were dark before. Her ideas had previously brought her to the point that this was some villainous treachery on the part of the Earl of Douglas:—there her conjectures had stopped short for a few moments—but thence they suddenly took a new impulse and dashed on with whirlwind celerity.

What was the treacherous aim which the Earl of Douglas now had in view? Might it not be the same which Father Julius had so nearly succeeded in carrying out—the abduction of Albertina! Yes; for was not Father Julius recently in the castle? did he, not through alleged curiosity visit the armoury, after Sir Casimir D'Este had decreed his release? might he not have heard mention made of the particular day on which there would be such bustle and excitement at Roslin? and might he not therefore have availed himself of all those circumstances to organize the present treacherous ambuscade?

Swift as a whirlwind did these thoughts pass through Margaret's brain; and no sooner did she fancy that she thus beheld the correct and accurate solution of the mystery, when she was decided how to act. At all events it was an experiment which it were well worth while to make; for if it succeeded, so much the better—and if it failed, her own position could not possibly be rendered worse than it was at present. It may be concluded that her fortitude continued to be marvellous and her courage immense; otherwise her intellect could not have been so clear, nor her mind so ready-witted in meeting the present fearful emergency.

"It is not with me solely," she thought within herself, "that these desperadoes have concern: for if so, am I not already in their power? and could they not at once do with me as they thought fit? It is therefore for some other that they are here:—and who could that other be if not Albertina? Or perhaps their designs of mischief may even go farther still?—perhaps they mean to take us all—the Earl—Sir Casimir—Albertina—myself—aye, and peradventure their audacity may go to the stretch of capturing the castle itself? Ah! this is most grave—most terrible! Perhaps at the present moment the safety of Roslin depends upon me?—and my success in saving it depends in its turn upon the veriest chance? Yet I must try! Margaret, Margaret!" she continued, thus in her rapid musings apostrophizing herself, "thou art already a queen: be a heroine likewise!—be worthy of the King whose spouse thou art! be worthy of the noble brother who vanquished the fierce Douglas in the fight! Oh, and I *am* inspired with fortitude the

grandest—the sublimest! Now then, the crisis is at hand!—now for the great experiment, which if succeeding, makes all else succeed—and if failing, makes all else fail! Yes—now to convince them—or at least to make them believe that I suspect not their presence here!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

MARGARET'S STRATAGEM

WHILE all these reflections were passing rapidly—indeed swift as a flight of birds through Margaret's brain, she still maintained that posture of thoughtfulness at the table,—her hand supporting her superb countenance, her eyes seeming to be fixed as the eyes of one who is thinking profoundly, and yet their regards the while flashing hither and thither—along the array of armed desperadoes on the right—along the array of armed desperadoes on the left—through the vista of the gloomy gallery to the very end, where the steel-clad shapes were only dimly and darkly seen in the obscurity that there prevailed. And through the bars of every helmet did keen eyes seem to glare fiercely down upon the lady as she was seated there! Her position was an appalling one,—sufficient to overawe the strongest soul and crush the mightiest spirit that ever harboured in female form. But still she lost not her fortitude: on the contrary, her courage appeared to rise in proportion as the sense of her stupendous peril increased, and the longer she envisaged the immensity of the dangers which environed her.

“Well,” she suddenly exclaimed aloud, as if thus passionately interrupting her own musings, “the letter must be finished—or else what will Albertina say when she comes to join me here, according to appointment and promise?—that letter which I pledged myself to write for her! Let me make another attempt!”

She then resumed her pen, and wrote something on the paper for a few minutes: but it was anything that came into her head that she now committed to that paper—for all idea of continuing her epistle to the King was for the moment set aside. At length she flung down her pen, ejaculating aloud, “No! I cannot do it unless Albertina be here to assist me!”

Then feigning the same spirit of petulance and impatience, she suddenly tore up the paper on which she had been writing:—she tore it into the minutest fragments, so that no part of it, if examined by stranger-eyes, should afford a clue to what the contents of the document were originally intended to be;—and she scattered all the fragments on the floor.

“It must be close upon midnight,” she exclaimed, as if still giving audible vent to her impatient thoughts; “and Albertina comes not! Ah! silly, silly Margaret that I am!—did I not promise to give her a parting sign that I would meet her here at this hour? and did I not forget to do it? Oh, foolish on my part!—and I have been upbraiding her! She is doubtless waiting for me? But I will go and fetch her hither at once.”

Thus speaking, Margaret sprang up from her seat; she extended her hand as if to take the lamp; and then, as though a second thought had smitten her, she ejaculated, “No, I will leave it here! I shall be back with Albertina in a few minutes.”

Now was the momentous crisis!—now was the awful turning-point in the destiny of this memorable night! As Margaret swept around her regards,

she fancied that from every helmet a pair of human eyes were glaring out upon her like red hot cinders or candescent bits of charcoal: her heart's power seemed to be paralyzed for an instant—she felt her brain reeling, her limbs sinking beneath her: but she planted her foot firmly upon the paved floor as she turned to quit the armoury, and all her courage revived in a moment. She advanced. Now was the time when if her passage were to be barred it would be arrested! Nothing would have surprised her less than if from every pedestal a living warrior had leapt down:—but all was still. She was prepared for the desperado on one side to stretch forth the lance with the floating pennon—and for the warrior on the other side to extend the huge two-handled sword: but no!—all was still. No one moved—nothing moved,—at least not perceptibly. She passed between those warriors on the pedestals at the entrance of the armoury: she reached the door—she opened it: even then she would not have been surprised to feel a gauntleted hand suddenly laid upon her shoulder: but no!—all remained quiet. She issued from the armoury—she closed the door behind herself:—she was safe!

But now for an instant there was a strong revulsion of feeling: she staggered against the wall for support—she felt as if her nerves, for some time past strung to so acute a degree of tension, must all in an instant give way:—but they did not. Again was she armed with a preternatural degree of courage; and she rushed along the passage, through the loopholes of which the beautiful argentine moonbeams shone. She reached the room of Redman; it was not a moment to stand upon any false delicacy: she opened the door—she burst in—she shook him by the shoulder, for he was sleeping in his couch. In a few hurried but plainly spoken words she made him aware of the tremendous danger which threatened the castle. He sprang up into complete wakefulness: he listened—and he said, “Gracious lady, I know what my duty is—and I will do it. Fear not! Hasten to Sir Casimir—and then to the Earl!”

Margaret quitted the lieutenant's room, her heart thrilling with a proud and joyous feeling apart from the sense of the important service she had succeeded in rendering,—a feeling inspired by the circumstance that Redman for the first time since the memorable bridal night had saluted her as a queen! She flew to the chamber of Sir Casimir D'Este: the Knight had not as yet sought his couch—a lamp was burning in his room—he was seated at the table, reading some papers that were spread before him. He was amazed on beholding her: but the startling intelligence was quickly communicated.

“I could not sleep—I went to the armoury, where I knew that there were writing materials, to pen a long letter to my brother;—and I acquired the certainty—the terrible certainty, that it is filled with desperadoes! Every panoply contains its man! I have warned Redman—he is on the alert. I now go to the Earl!”

“Brave and heroic Margaret!” exclaimed Sir Casimir, who without knowing the particulars of the stupendous incident, yet saw enough to convince him that she must have displayed some wondrous presence of mind: “you will have saved the castle—and perhaps all our lives!”

He pressed her hand; and she felt glad at meriting the approval of that man whose influence seemed to make itself felt upon all with whom he came in contact. She hurried from his chamber, just as he began to put on his helmet; and she sped away to the apartment of the Earl of Caithness. This nobleman was in bed and sleeping. Margaret at once awoke him as but two minutes back she

had awakened Redman; and she spoke to his lordship in the same sense as she had spoken to Sir Casimir D'Este. He praised her in similar terms as those which had emanated from the lips of the Teutonic Knight; and she sped away to Albertina's chamber—but with the intention of breaking the news far more delicately to the gentle maiden, than she had thought it needful to do to the lieutenant, the Knight, or the Earl.

We must here inform the reader that since the capture of Hermitage Castle, and the solemn compacts which the Earl of Douglas had entered into not to prosecute or renew the feudal strife with the Earl of Caithness, the retainers who had been called in to garrison Roslin were dismissed to their respective homes, inasmuch as it was not for a moment apprehended that these compacts would be broken. But still there were a number of male dependants belonging to the princely establishment of the Earl of Caithness far more than sufficient, if properly led, to overpower and capture all the desperadoes who were secreted in the armoury: and that they were *sure* to be properly led, was guaranteed by the known valour of Redman, and by the presence of the mighty warrior, Sir Casimir D'Este. Redman lost no time in buckling on his armour: he stole from his apartment—he went to Hepburn—thence to three or four others of the principal domestics; and they were soon hurrying about to the domiciles and chambers, the lodgings and the outhouses, inhabited by the rest of the male dependancy. All these proceedings were conducted with as much caution as despatch: silence and celerity were their main characteristics. In a word, not more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed from the moment when the warning was given to Redman, ere sixty or seventy men were under arms, divided into different groups, and ready for the service which now demanded all their energies.

As the reader is aware, there were two entrances into the armoury—one by the main door opening from the passage communicating with the principal apartments of the castle, and the other by a secret door opening from another little passage tortuously diverging from the main one: and it will be remembered that it was this latter means of access to the armoury which had enabled Stephen Cochrane to listen to the conversation between Margaret and the King. The existence of this secret door was quickly communicated to Sir Casimir D'Este; and he, at once assuming the command of the night's enterprise, lost not a moment in making his dispositions.

Thus was it that at twelve o'clock on that memorable night the principal entrance and the private door of the armoury were all in a moment flung open; and through both avenues poured a number of armed men. One body was led by Sir Casimir and the Earl of Caithness—the other by Redman. Nothing could exceed the effect thus produced. Ejaculations of rage burst forth from within many a barred helmet: down from the pedestals sprang the fierce Borderers, who, as Margaret rightly divined, had stealthily introduced themselves that day into Roslin Castle and had sheathed their forms in the panoplies of steel, and chain, and mail which were preserved in that armoury. The domestics of Roslin were accompanied by numerous torch-bearers; so that when the conflict commenced—as instantaneously it did—it was a spectacle of the most awe-inspiring and fearful interest.

"Surrender, every one of you, if ye would save your lives!" thundered the sonorous voice of Sir Casimir D'Este: "or I swear by the holy Teutonic cross! that if a drop of blood be spilt, ye shall all assuredly die!"

But this fearful and portentous warning was of no avail; for the Borderers, maddened by rage and disappointment—knowing how terribly they had offended against every law—mistrustful of the promise held out—and therefore goaded to desperation by a sense of their position, commenced a furious onslaught upon their enemies. And no doubt likewise they entertained the idea that armed in perfect panoplies as they were, they were far more than a match for their opponents, who had scarcely any defensive weapons at all. Thus if it were possible for the Borderers to maintain their position, they by their own unaided valour might capture the castle; but even if in this hope they should be disappointed, they thought they might at least cut their way through their enemies down to the gate—there they might make a stand while the portcullis was being raised and the drawbridge lowered—for they knew that concealed in the woods that clothed the glen, there was a powerful auxiliary force of their comrades, ready to take advantage of whatsoever circumstances might transpire in favour of their own cause.

It was under all these influences that the Borderers—clad in armour as they were, and well provided with every species of offensive weapon—at once commenced a furious attack upon the two bodies of the Roslin people that burst by different means of access into the armoury. Throughout the entire castle the din of battle might be heard; while in her own chamber, the beauteous Albertina lay half fainting with terror upon the bosom of her friend Margaret; and all their female dependants who had gathered there, were listening with pale countenances, and clasped hands, and palpitating hearts, to the clash of arms and the other terrific sounds of strife which reached their ears.

Awful was the suspense endured in that chamber: for upwards of twenty minutes it lasted:—then the din of battle began rapidly to diminish, until at length it ceased.

"I will go and see the result!" exclaimed Margaret; "though heaven be thanked! I have a presentiment—"

At this instant the door was thrown open; and the Earl of Caithness made his appearance. Blood was upon his garments: but Albertina had not time to perceive it, ere with a wild cry of joy she precipitated herself into her father's arms.

"The victory is ours!" he exclaimed: "the traitors have succumbed!"

Ejaculations of delight from the tongues of the two ladies and all the handmaidens, constituted an appropriate psalm for that triumphant announcement.

"Yes," cried the Earl; "the victory is a most signal one—but alas! most sanguinary! At least half of the Borderers—who were nearly thirty in number—have fallen; and five of our own brave men have met their death in the conflict!"

"The Holy Virgin be thanked! you, my father, are safe!" murmured Albertina. "But Oh! those poor faithful domestics of ours who have fallen—"

"And Sir Casimir? and Redman?" exclaimed Margaret hastily.

"Safe!" ejaculated the Earl. "And Oh! my child—Oh, Margaret! nothing could exceed the valour with which Sir Casimir fought. It was the courage of the lion and the irresistible power of the tiger, bearing down all before him—yet blended with a coolness which rendered his might all the more terrible! One could scarcely believe it was a denizen of earth that was fighting, and assuredly it was not the ignoble spectacle of a fiend's rage—but there is something godlike (heaven shield me from blasphemous meaning!) in the martial bearing of that man! Twice did he save my life—"



No. 16.—MARGARET.

"Oh, brave Sir Casimir!" ejaculated Albertina enthusiastically.

"Ah, brave to that degree," exclaimed the Earl, "which makes even the bravest about him seem only dastards and poltroons! The mightiest heroes would be but dwarfs and pigmies in a strife where he is present! Yet all honour to the bold and steady Redman, who played his part gallantly. He is slightly wounded—"

"Oh, heaven! and you too are wounded, my dear father!" shrieked Albertina, now perceiving blood upon her own garments, and at once glancing in affright to the spot on the Earl's clothes whence the stain was caught.

"It is nothing. Look!" said the Earl; "be not alarmed, my beloved child!"—and pulling up his sleeve, he displayed a wound on the left arm.

Albertina conquered her fears in order that she might be enabled to dress the wound: it was indeed but an insignificant one; and the requisite attentions were quickly ministered.

"And now, my dear child," said the Earl of Caithness, a sombre shade coming over his countenance,—“and you likewise, my dear Margaret—ye also, young maidens—prepare yourselves to learn that a terrible chastisement is about to be inflicted on the wretched traitors who have survived the conflict! They have merited their fate; and under existing circumstances it would be a sickly stretch of humanity to raise a voice in their behalf. Duly warned were they in the outset by Sir Casimir D'Este—they might have saved their lives—but they rejected the terms which his generosity proffered—and the blood of five of my own faithful retainers cries for vengeance!”

"Oh, father!" murmured Albertina shudderingly, "is this necessary?—is it indeed requisite? Vengeance is terrible!"

"A righteous punishment, my dear child, differs from a cold-blooded vengeance," answered the Earl, with solemn awe in his look and voice. "Rest assured that the brave and generous Sir Casimir would spare where mercy might be shown; and I think you know your own father well enough to be aware that he would not sanction a deed of cruelty."

"And what is the punishment which these wretched men are to undergo?" inquired Albertina, in a scarcely audible voice.

The Earl hesitated—remained silent for a few moments—and then said, "Ask me not now, Albertina. You shall know presently!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE GLEN.

It has been already said that the Borderers who obtained a stealthy admission into Roslin Castle, and concealed themselves in the armoury, were aware that a powerful auxiliary force of their comrades was hidden amidst the woods which clothed the glen. And such was the case. Father Julius had in the first instance suggested the enterprise—the Earl of Douglas had gladly assented to it—and Magnus Balveny undertook to carry it out. Balveny's proceedings were conducted with the utmost caution and skill, and indeed with such an amount of strategical success that the project would have no doubt realized a complete triumph, were it not for the accident of Margaret's visit to the armoury and her discovery of the presence of the desperadoes there.

Nearly thirty Borderers had succeeded in penetrating into the castle during that day; and upwards of a hundred more of the Douglas retainers lay in ambush amidst the thick woods of the glen. Their presence in those groves was totally unsuspected by all the persons connected with the castle: crowds had visited the fortalice during the day—and it was believed that none but friendly-disposed persons had thus in any way sought the vicinage of the castellated home of the Earl of Caithness. But during the lapse of those hours when so much activity and bustle prevailed within the walls when there were so many comings and goings, so many people upon the bridge, such numbers likewise in all the pathways of the glen—it was a matter of the greatest ease for Balveny's followers to slip singly, or by twos and threes, into the mazes of the groves at different periods of the day,—taking care to keep apart from each other, or at least only to collect in small groups, so that any straggler belonging to the Roslin community who might happen to pass through the same woods, stood no chance of beholding any suspicious assemblage of persons. But when the dusk set in—when the crowds of tenants and vassals had all dispersed from Roslin and separated to their respective homes,—then did the fierce Borderers who had secreted themselves in the woods, begin to move towards a particular spot previously agreed upon, so that the entire force might be concentrated to be in readiness for the moment when it was hoped it would have an opportunity to act.

The reader has now obtained a tolerably complete insight into the plot which Father Julius had in the first instance suggested, and which Magnus Balveny was charged by his baronial master to carry out. Father Julius had however been instructed to accompany Captain Balveny, in case his assistance should be in any way needed; for the monk had made the best use of his time while an inmate of Roslin Castle—he had rendered himself familiarly acquainted with all the topographical arrangements of the fortalice—he had even ascertained where the chambers of the principal personages were situated—and thus in every respect did the friar seem to be a useful adjunct to the expedition: always supposing that matters progressed according to the hopes and intentions of the plotters.

The auxiliary force of about a hundred armed men, whom Balveny had selected for the service of concealment in the woods, were now all concentrated in the thicket that was nearest to the stone bridge. There they lay, motionless as so many crouching wild beasts or coiled-up reptiles, awaiting the moment for springing upon their prey. About twenty paces in advance of that thicket was a knot of some half-dozen trees; and in the shade of their foliage two persons were reclining. These were Magnus Balveny and Father Julius. The moon was shining bright in a cloudless sky; and boldly stood out the massive towers and ramparts of Roslin against that ethereal background. As the eye glanced along the glen, it might discern all the various shades which the foliage or the crags took from the manner in which the moonlight was shed upon them,—patches of inky blackness contrasting with spots of argentine brilliancy,—for here the beams made jutting rocks and masses of verdure look as if cast in silver, while there all was darkness in the shade as if the eye rested upon the mouths of stupendous caverns. And then, looking deeper down into the glen, the gleaming foam of the eddying Esk might be discerned, rolling its rapid course beneath the shade of overhanging trees—now rushing on as if losing itself in subterranean darkness—then bursting into light,—catching the moonbeams on the crest of its wavelets, and throwing up the spray from its eddies like so

many courtesans in the argentine splendour of the night.

Such was the scene which met the view of Magnus Balveny and Father Julius, as they sat or rather half reclined on the soft grass beneath the spreading branches of the little knot of trees, which looked like a vidette or outpost thrown out by the larger assemblage of trees constituting the grove just behind. For some hours had Magnus Balveny and Father Julius been hanging about in the neighbourhood, taking good care however to keep themselves beyond the view of the retainers of Roslin; but it was only since sunset that they had ventured so close to the bridge of the castle as we now behold them. There they were, in readiness for whatsoever circumstances might now transpire: but Father Julius had not been unmindful of creature-comforts—and Magnus Balveny had shown not the slightest objection to share the pasty and the flask with which the priest had provided himself.

"The time approaches," said Magnus Balveny, "when your project, Sir Priest, will be put to the fullest test. It must now be past the eleventh hour; and I think you told me that silence usually prevails at this period of the night throughout Roslin Castle?"

"Yes—such is the custom, good Magnus," answered the monk: "but it is impossible to say whether this may not be an exceptional occasion. However, you best know what instructions you gave your men—"

"Sdeath!" ejaculated Balveny; "what instructions could I give them except those which were suggested by yourself? I bade them wait until all was silent within the walls of Roslin Castle—then to steal forth from the armoury—"

"Good!" said the priest. "And from that point what shape may your orders have assumed, good Magnus?"

"Here again might I refer your reverence to your own suggestions," replied Balveny: "but doubtless you wish to assure yourself that there was a right understanding between us—and so therefore let it be. Listen! On issuing forth from the armoury, two or three of my brave fellows will speed to the chamber of Sir Casimir D'Este, and overpower him at once."

"Ah! and absolutely necessary too!—for there is no safety while that roaring lion is at large, any more than there can be goodness in the world while the Old Serpent is loosened from the bottomless pit. But pray proceed, Captain Balveny. We will suppose Sir Casimir D'Este to be overpowered—"

"And next you may suppose," added Magnus, "that the Lady Albertina Roslin is taken prisoner."

"Of course!—'tis the gist of the whole enterprise," said the monk. "And she will at once be hurried off—"

"To Tantallon Castle," proceeded Balveny; "because, if we succeed in capturing Roslin, so much the better: but if we fail, the lady herself will at least be in our power!—the fair prize will have been secured for our lord and master, the puissant Earl of Douglas!"

"Then, while some of your brave fellows inside the castle are securing the Teutonic Knight, and others capturing the beauteous Albertina—"

"The remainder," continued Balveny, "will be rushing down to the entrance-gates to secure the sentinels and the warders—to raise the portcullis and to lower the drawbridge—"

"So that your men behind here"—and Father Julius glanced over his shoulder—"may spring up from their ambush and rush across the stone

bridge, sword in hand—naught to oppose them—the wooden drawbridge lowered—the portcullis raised—their comrades ready to receive them—"

"And then consternation and confusion throughout the castle," added Balveny,—"the dependants awaking to find themselves prisoners—the lieutenant Redman vainly calling to arms—Caithness as fruitlessly demanding his daughter—the Teutonic Knight chafing and fuming as a captive in his own chamber—in short, all the pride of Roslin humiliated and the castle our own by one of the boldest strokes ever played! Ah, I forgot! there will be the beauteous Margaret Fitz-Allan to deal with likewise—"

"You will do well, Captain Balveny," interrupted Father Julius, speaking gravely, "to keep your hands off the lady to whom you have referred, and to bear a respectful demeanour in her presence. Remember you not that for this condition I expressly stipulated, when the other day at Tantallon I first broached the entire project to the noble Douglas and yourself?"

"Ah, by my troth," said Balveny carelessly, "I do bethink me of some such condition imposed on your part. But why, holy father, should you have conceived such a special interest in Mistress Margaret? Has she looked kindly upon your reverence?—has Sir Fleming's superb sister entertained so singular a whim as to smile upon the monk with the grizzled beard—"

"Cease this flippancy!" exclaimed Father Julius sternly: "a truce to this ribald discourse! Suffice it for you, Captain Balveny, to remember the pledge which I extorted, to the effect that no insult either in word or look be shown to the lady of whom we are speaking. And now, reverting to our former topics, let us suppose Roslin Castle to be captured—to be carried by a sudden strategic blow—"

"If we suppose this much, holy father," interrupted Balveny, "we shall have all possible reason to anticipate that the cause of our noble Douglas will become uppermost, and that in every sense may he dictate his own terms to the proud Earl of Caithness. But now, holy father," continued Balveny, "since your reverence seems to be in a humour for supposition and conjecture, let us imagine the very reverse of all this to be the case. In short, what if the project fail?"

"Does Captain Balveny dream of failure?" asked the priest, with an accent that was slightly taunting.

"Sdeath! holy father," ejaculated Balveny. "I have lately been taught to look upon both sides of the picture. There was a time when I thought that in all which concerned the noble house of Douglas there was but one side—and this the bright! But circumstances have bent my mind into graver moods; and when I think of the lists on the plain just behind this glen—when I think likewise of Hermitage Castle—I am not quite so sanguine, Sir Priest, in the good fortunes of the Douglas as I used to be. This therefore is the reason which induces me to ask what can be done if our present enterprise should fail? Because, understand me well, Sir Priest!" continued Balveny; "if the enterprise do fail, then as a matter of course will it be discovered that such an attempt was made, just the same as if it succeeded fully. Well, and greater still will be the indignation of the Earl of Caithness against our noble master!—more strenuous will become his efforts to combine all hostile circumstances—"

"True!" said Father Julius, now beginning to think that he had somewhat rashly advised the present expedition, and that he had plunged somewhat precipitately into it. "Dependent upon the

fortunes of the masters are those, of the hangers-on—"

"And if the Douglas go down," interjected Balveny, "we all go down together with him! It will not be the plunge of one into the vortex of ruin—but the plunge of many! Come, therefore, Sir Priest—tell me what is to be done if this present enterprise should fail? But Ah! I bethink me that there were some mysterious words which dropped from your lips the other day on your return to Tantallon? In good sooth, I mean the very day on which you suggested the scheme which is now in progress!"

"Yes—I spoke certain words, Captain Balveny," said the priest; "but this is not a fitting opportunity to discuss them."

"Aye, but it seems to me a most fitting occasion!" ejaculated Magnus; "for when one is deep in a scheme that may fail, 'tis well to know how the evil consequences of such failure may be retrieved. Besides, my curiosity is piqued; for the words you spoke the other day have returned vividly to my recollection. Little note had I before taken of them: but now they have flamed up as it were in my mind!"

"Think of something else, Captain Balveny," said the priest. "Words that were lightly thrown out—"

"Father Julius," said Balveny, suddenly adopting a stern tone, and fixing his eyes menacingly upon the priest, "you would not have me understand that you have dared speak lightly to the Earl of Douglas? By St. Bride, 'tis more than your skin is worth! Now look you, Sir Priest! the import of your words has not been forgotten; and you will presently show me that they were something more than a mere idle vaunt or a wilfully practised deception. You said that you, the humble ecclesiastic, pledged yourself that all should go well with your noble patron—aye, and you declared that the means to which you thus alluded, must be reserved as a last resource if this present enterprise should fail. Solve me the riddle of your words, Sir Priest!"

"It is my secret, good Captain Balveny," responded Father Julius; "and you will not press me to reveal it—"

"As for pressing you to reveal it," interrupted Balveny, half drawing his dagger from its sheath,—"now that my curiosity is piqued, and that I am bent upon knowing what it is that thus hovers in your mind, it is not merely pressing you as if with entreaty, but it is urging you in the form of a wholesome recommendation that if you would avoid an acquaintance with my dagger's point—"

"Captain Balveny!" exclaimed the monk, "you would not dare touch a holy member of the Church!"

"Tush, holy father!" ejaculated Magnus: "the Church has not eyes large enough or clear enough to see into this glen; and if you anger me, here is my dagger's point—there rolls the eddying Esk—and what will the whole Church establishment be the wiser in respect to the fate of Father Julius when his corpse is either washed upon the shore at a distance—or else hurried to the sea, never again to meet the human eye at all?"

Father Julius knew full well that Magnus Balveny was a man of reckless and desperate disposition—fierce, impetuous, headstrong, and vindictive, like his master the Black Earl. He therefore quivered at the language thus held out to him; and it was with tremulous accents he exclaimed, "The holy saints forgive you, Captain Balveny, for the evil thoughts you entertain concerning me!"

"Look you, holy father," said Magnus, again halt

drawing his dagger from its sheath, and thus playing with it for a little while, so that it gleamed ghastly in the moonbeams; "it is now a question of aye or nay with you, whether you and I are to be friends or enemies? Let the decision be quickly made. You say that you have a secret which may work wonders if the present enterprise should fail. Now, as I am marvellously interested in all the consequences of the present enterprise, it is natural enough I should seek to become the sharer of this secret of your's which seems to be as a talisman of safety. Therefore, without another syllable of useless parley, say what your secret is—and save yourself the pain of a blow from this dagger, and me the misfortune of inflicting it."

"Heaven help thee, thou ruthless man!" said Father Julius, "for the wickedness of the course which thou art pursuing towards me!"

"Aye, if thou thyself wast immaculate," interjected Balveny, "thou mightest preach sermons unto me. But seeing how circumstances stand—"

"At least let there be friendship betwixt us, good Magnus," said Father Julius; "and see that you repeat not to the noble Earl our patron, nor to any other living soul, the secret which I am about to impart."

"Assuredly I will keep your secret, Sir Priest, until it may regard the safety of us all to reveal it. In sooth, I care not for the secret itself: I only wish to acquire the certainty that it has a real and veritable existence, and that you *do* possess a talisman of safety whose influence may be shed upon us all, whatsoever ill may betide."

"Be satisfied therefore! be convinced!" said the priest: and as he thus spoke, it was with infinite satisfaction and with a strong feeling of relief that he beheld Magnus Balveny thrust back the dagger entirely into its sheath. "Look! this scrap of parchment"—and he produced a slip from beneath the folds of his gown—"is indeed a talisman of safety for all who may become acquainted with the secret—"

"Perdition take this parley of your's, Sir Priest!" ejaculated Balveny: "let us know the secret at once! Spell me the contents of that document. I see the writing: but may I perish if I can decipher a single letter! Fighting, and not reading, has been my pursuit in life, i'faith!"

"Look again!" said the priest, pointing with his forefinger to the paper: "that is a name which you may have seen, written often enough, on deeds and letters-patent to our noble master—"

"Aye! by St. Bride, I recognise that name!" ejaculated Balveny. "But this other—Ah! what was that you whispered in my ear?"

"Hush!" said the priest: "let not the night-zephyr catch it! Now you begin to comprehend—"

"Holy father," interrupted Balveny, "it is monstrous! it is preposterous! You are deceiving me!"

"Hush!—hush, I say! Not so loud!" murmured the monk. "Remember that your men are close behind, in the ambuscade of the trees—"

"But this intelligence—so startling, so amazing!"—and Balveny looked confounded.

"I swear by the blessed cross that it is true!" rejoined the priest, as he consigned the document back again to a secret pocket within the bosom of his gown. "And now, Captain Balveny, you will admit I neither jested nor vaunted—nor spoke too lightly, nor talked too big—when I declared that I possessed the power to save our noble patron—In a word, good Magnus, you will acknowledge that this is a talisman of safety for us all, in case that by any accident the present enterprise should fail, and—"

"Ah, the work has begun!" ejaculated Magnus Balveny, starting up to his feet from the soft grass on which he was sitting by the priest's side. "Look! those lights!—they are springing up in every room!—they are moving to and fro—flashing and hurrying hither and thither!—Yes, by heaven! the business of the night has commenced!"

There was now a noise in the wood behind,—a rustling of leaves and crackling of branches; and Balveny comprehended what these sounds meant.

"Keep still, my brave men!" he exclaimed; "keep still for the present! Move not a hand—put not a foot forward, till you receive the word of command! 'Tis impossible to say how fares it within the castle-walls!"

"Rest assured," ejaculated Father Julius, "that all goes well—your men are successful—the brave Borderers are doing their good work——"

"Be not too sure!" interrupted Balveny. "The confusion in the castle increases—the lights flash hither and thither more quickly—they spring up in every window—perhaps there is a conflict! My men may have met resistance! Who knows?"

"Forward, forward!—let us to the rescue!" ejaculated several voices from the crowd behind.

"Silence, men! I command you! Silence, and be still!" vociferated Balveny.

"But our brethren are perhaps being massacred!" cried the same voices from the wood. "Let us forward to their succour!"

"Fools!" exclaimed Balveny, now furious with rage: "how can you cross over to the castle till the drawbridge is lowered?—how can you enter till the portcullis is raised?"

"We will swim the Eek! we will scale the rocks and the walls! we demand to be led to the onslaught! The loss of Hermitage is to be avenged!"—and the voices increased in vehemence.

"Silence—silence, I command you!" thundered Balveny. "Ye know me, my men! I am terrible to punish! Do not anger me! By St. Bride! Father Julius, the work thickens within the castle!—every window gleams or flashes with its lights!—all the inmates are up!"

"Yes!" cried the priest: "the issue will soon be known!"

"Hark!" said Balveny: "as I am a living man methinks I hear the clash of arms! Hush, hush!—then after a long pause, during which he held his breath suspensefully to listen, he added, "Yes, 'tis so! the sound comes through the still night air! Ah! the din increases! Yes, there is a conflict!—and now 'tis more than ever necessary to abide in patience the result!"

The men were still murmuring in the wood: but Balveny no longer paid any attention to them; and upwards of twenty minutes, or nearly half-an-hour went by without enabling those watchers on the side of the glen to form any positive opinion as to what was going on within the walls of Roslin Castle. But that there was a conflict, could not be doubted—for the din, though distant and faint, was still nevertheless unmistakably perceptible to the experienced ears of the listeners on the side of the wooded glen.

"What think you?" inquired Father Julius, at the expiration of a long interval of silence—which pause however was full of acute suspense.

"Death! I know not what to think!" answered Balveny, who was getting terribly agitated. "The conflict has been sufficiently prolonged to show that it is not very unequal!—whereas I had hoped that it would have been finished by this time in favour of our party! Yet who knows? Ah! is that the raising of the portcullis? No—not yet! Our men

have not so far achieved success as to gain the entrance-gates!"

"Pray heaven," murmured the priest, crossing himself, "that they experience not failure!"

"Or else," rejoined Balveny, "we shall indeed be compelled to have recourse sooner or later to that talisman of yours! Ah! while I bethink me," he ejaculated, thus suddenly interrupting himself, "what guarantees have we that you will use your power for the weal of your patron and your friends?—that you will not suffer yourself to be either coerced or bribed——"

"Do you deem me so selfish?" demanded Father Julius.

"Faith! the world's circumstances," exclaimed Magnus Burtly, "make us all look pretty close after our own interests! But Ah! what means this? Lights upon the ramparts!—lights along the walls!—torches!"

"Yes—lights upon the ramparts!" echoed Father Julius: "a hurrying to and fro of many persons!—torches waving!—the lurid glare reflected on the points of weapons!"

"'Tis strange! 'tis sinister! I understand it not!" exclaimed Balveny. "No signal is made! no banner is hoisted! The gates remain closed!—no portcullis raised! no drawbridge lowered! Why, surely my own brave handful of men cannot have already done all the work?"

"And surely, surely," said the priest, now trembling with suspense, "they cannot have experienced failure!"

"Oh, by heaven! but there is a failure?" exclaimed Magnus Balveny, now furious, frenzied, and frantic with excitement. "Look! look! 'tis horrible! Malediction! But stay! stop!—put not a foot forward, I command you! We may fall into a snare! Heaven only knows what our enemies may be doing!"

And now a horrible scene was indeed taking place within the view of those who were concealed on the wooded slope of the glen. As if the argentine splendour of moon and stars were not sufficient to light the tragedy—as if the natural lustre of the night's heaven were not adequate for the setting-forth of the full ghastliness of the proceedings—recourse was had to an artificial illumination. Torches were waving to and fro upon the rampart of Roslin Castle: it was that particular rampart also which exactly faced the spot where the Borderers were concealed. The glare of those torches flashed upon the armour and the weapons of many men: there were bustle and activity—there were ominous proceedings,—at first not well understood by those who viewed them from the distance—then quickly developing their portentous fearfulness, as beams were raised perpendicularly and ladders were upreared—and then cross-beams were adjusted,—all the hideous preparations of death thus developing themselves upon the walls of Roslin Castle!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EXECUTION.

FROM amidst the little knot of trees Magnus Balveny and Father Julius were now looking on with glaring and distended orbs,—their forms transfixed—their feet rooted to the ground—but rage and consternation in the heart of the fierce Captain—horror and dismay in that of the craven monk—while all their veins were swollen with excitement, and if scrutinized, would have seemed like knotted cords distended beneath the skin. And forth from

the outskirts of the wood had rushed the hundred Borderers, on hearing the passionate ejaculations wrung from the lips of their chief by the frenzied anticipations of horror which seized upon him when the terrible scene first began to develop itself, like a phantasmagorian nightmare, on the rampart of Roslin. But where they had stridden forth from the wood, there those fierce Borderers had stopped short—there they had halted, as if smitten with one common presentiment of impending fearfulness!—there they paused—there they were transfixed, in that state of mind whose paralyzed energy was prompt to undergo the next natural transition of appalling panic. No need had Balveny now to ejaculate his command for his men to keep still and do nothing rashly. Motionless as statues were they all! There was not one to raise a voice to proclaim the word "Forward!" for they knew not into what ambush they might fall—into what snare a single step might precipitate them. They seemed as if they had fallen into the midst of terrible enchantments, the spells of which might be fraught with death in all its most hideous shapes!

And by the aid of the torches looming like lurid meteors above the castle rampart—mocking as it were heaven's sublimer and purer illumination—the whole ghastly spectacle was rendered clearly apparent. Many gibbets were raised—spars and beams were rapidly run up and put together as if by magic,—the swarms of armed men upon the wall proving only too plainly that the retainers of Roslin were the victors, and that the Borderers who had penetrated into the Castle were vanquished, overpowered, and about to suffer the doom of men taken in such a case. And amidst the crowd was one form towering above all the rest,—a form clad in complete armour, and who seemed to be the dread arbiter of the fate of the culprits—terrible, with his extended arm, as implacable Destiny itself! Balveny and the monk suddenly exchanged expressive glances from their glaring horror-stricken eyeballs; for they both knew that the form which they thus beheld, was that of the Teutonic Knight. So that if the faintest doubt had remained in their minds with respect to the results of the conflict which had assuredly taken place within the walls of Roslin, it was now completely set at rest, to their own utter consternation and dismay.

It was a wholesale execution that was taking place; and this was the punishment which the Earl of Caithness had spoken of to his daughter and to Margaret,—a punishment so necessary under existing circumstances, and so well merited by the offenders, that neither the natural generosity of Sir Casimir D'Este nor the instinctive humanity of the Earl himself, had conscientiously chosen to intervene. Yes—this was the chastisement the full nature of which the Earl had not dared all in a moment to explain to Albertina, and Margaret, and to their female dependants, when the question was put to him. There were thirteen or fourteen human beings about to die the death of dastard traitors,—men who had stealthily introduced themselves into a peaceful homestead with intents of direst wickedness—men who had refused to accept the quarter that was offered them, but who had dared the rage of sanguinary battle and were now about to meet its sternly righteous consequences. From the lips of some of them the whole truth had been extorted: Sir Casimir D'Este, had learnt how an auxiliary force was concealed amidst the woody mazes of the glen, ready to penetrate into the castle and consummate the work which it was hoped their comrades in the armoury would have succeeded in initiating. Having ascertained in which part of the glen that auxiliary force of feudal

enemies was ambushed, the Teutonic Knight had resolved to strike a terrible blow and make a fearful example, in the view of the foemen thus hidden in the groves. And all this was now comprehended by the horror-stricken beholders there!

Speedily as it was appalling was the work of death prosecuted. The gibbets were raised—the nooses were adjusted to the cross beams—a few shrieks of agony were heard pealing from the walls: they rang across the eddying Esk—they rang through the ambient moonlit air—they reached the ears of the witnesses amidst the groves of the glen: they pierced through their very brains! But it was only a few—some three or four of the culprits on the rampart—who thus gave vent to their mortal anguish. These were the youngest of the band: the others maintained a stern, sullen silence,—thinking by the gloominess of their mood that they defied the death to which they were condemned and which was staring them in the face.

It only occupied minutes to accomplish that which it takes us a much longer period through the circumlocutory process of language to describe. For the culprits were bound hand and foot as they were hurried up to the wall: the beams and spars were in readiness—cords had been quickly knotted and nooses reeved—and there were many of the retainers of Roslin prompt to wreak the vengeance that was so well deserved. Thus the halters were quickly fastened around the necks of the offenders; and by the light of the blazing torches—flaming red, lurid, and ominous above that rampart on the escarped rock—the captives were strung up to the gibbets. Plainly visible was the awful spectacle to the beholders on the acclivitous side of the glen; and now ejaculations of horror burst forth from their lips. But still they stood riveted to the spot, as if with the hideous presentiment that all was not yet over. And they were right! Ten mortal minutes passed,—ten minutes which seemed as many ages; and though almost every hand was laid upon its sword, yet not a single weapon was drawn from its sheath. For what could these beholders do? against whom were they to fight? The objects of the vengeance they would have vainly wreaked, were safe beyond their reach upon the wall of an impregnable castle. Ah! and even if those hundred Borderers, with the warlike Balveny at their head, had dashed forward, the eddying torrents of the Esk would have barred their way—the drawbridge was still raised—and it would have been as vain to hope to penetrate into the fortalice as if they had gone to dash themselves against the escarped rock on which the castle itself stood, with the idea of scaling it. Yes—but more still!—for even supposing that they should have found the drawbridge lowered and the portcullis raised, and that they could have penetrated within the walls of Roslin, what chance would they have stood in battling against men already flushed with success, and those men led by a warrior of such wondrous prowess as Sir Casimir D'Este? Thus were these hundred Borderers in every sense powerless to avenge their executed comrades; while on the other hand a vague and unknown sense of danger was stealing upon their own minds.

The minutes passed—and there they stood, all still riveted to the spot, though in that mental state which only required the slightest incident—a rustling amidst the trees, or a straw flitting past—to strike them with panic. But now commenced another scene upon the castle-rampart within their view. One by one each corpse was cut down from its gibbet, and hurled toward by stalwart arms so as to clear the jutting masses of the escarped rock; and one by one each body was precipitated into

the Esk. Every successive splash was heard by those who beheld all this from the wood. One after another were the corpses consigned to the turbid waters, which hurried them onward,—some to sink into the deep holes in the river's bed—others to be dashed against the crags projecting from the banks—and others to be borne towards the sea. Then suddenly the gibbets began to disappear: down they came from the walls—the assemblage melted away from that rampart likewise—torch vanished after torch—and old Roslin, uprearing itself upon its rock, looked as still and calm, with its grey hue in the moonlight, as if naught sinister nor appalling had transpired to horrify or disturb the silence of its night.

But now came the panic for the Borderers in the wood.

"They will rush forth from the castle! Sir Casimir will lead them! Our enemies are numerous! They swarm where we thought them a handful! Fly for your lives!—fly!"

Such were the cries that burst forth from the lips of the terror-stricken men; so that as if with one accord, they turned and fled. It was a wild rush, as if a herd of frightened deer were dashing through the wood. Balveny and the priest were now completely alone in the shade of the knot of trees; and they stood gazing upon each other in profound silence for upwards of a minute. There was something terribly sinister and threatening in Balveny's look, which struck a new and different terror to the heart of Father Julius; so that the priest was fascinated as if by a reptile-gaze, and he could not run in the wake of all the rest who had fled.

"You do not—you do not blame me, good Magnus," he at length said, in tremulous accents, "for this sad, sad failure?"

"Blame you?" ejaculated Balveny; and his looks grew more sinister. "Blame you?" he repeated. "Oh! by all the saints, you are either the veriest traitor or the most stark staring fool that ever caused the massacre of a number of brave men! But by heaven! the talisman of safety shall be mine!"

Thus speaking, Magnus Balveny sprang upon the priest like a tiger darting upon its prey, and hurled him to the ground. The cry that was bursting from the lips of the wretched monk, was stifled by the fingers of Balveny as they grasped his throat with the throttling effect of an iron vice. Magnus thrust his other hand within the folds of the priest's garb: he clutched the slip of parchment, and with an ejaculation of triumph he drew it forth.

"There! 'tis mine!" exclaimed Balveny; "and whatever power it may have to do good, shall be used for my noble master and myself! Shift you on your own account, Sir Monk!"

Balveny had sprung up to his feet from off the prostrate form of Father Julius, who now raised himself slowly and painfully, saying in an imploring tone, "Leave me not here, to fall into the hands of the Roslin enemies!"

"Fool!" cried Balveny, with a mocking laugh: "you have legs to run with! Shift for yourself, I say, as I shall do!"

With these words the Captain of the Borderers dashed away from the spot, and plunged into the wood, through the mazes of which he hurried at the utmost of his speed, in a strange unnatural state of mind,—enraged and horrified at the catastrophe which had attended the enterprise, but chuckling at the thought, of having obtained possession of the slip of parchment which he had by this time secured about his person.

Onward sped Balveny; and soon the outskirts of

the wood was reached on the higher part of the acclivitous side of the glen. At that moment ejaculations of savage joy burst upon his ears; and he was seized upon by some half-dozen men who at the same instant were turning the angle of the grove. They were some of his own men,—some of his own Borderers who thus dealt with him.

"How now, fellows?" exclaimed Balveny, thinking that it was an error on their part, and that they supposed him to be some one else: "for whom do you take me?"

"For what you are!" they exclaimed,—*"a knave or a traitor, who has ruined everything!"*

"Fools, stand off!" he cried, at the same time by a desperate effort disengaging himself from their grasp. "It was not my fault!"

"It was!—it was your fault, and the priest's!" they vociferated. "Knives and traitors both!"

Balveny's sword had flashed from its sheath, for he saw that there was a vindictive frenzy and a fierce rage in the looks of those men.

"Our brethren have been murdered before our eyes!" cried one, dealing a tremendous blow at his Captain.

"My father was amongst them!" exclaimed a second.

"My brother likewise!" ejaculated a third.

"My only son!" yelled a fourth.

The other two gave vent to exclamations to the effect that they had lost their bosom-friends: and every fierce cry was accompanied by a still fiercer blow.

"Madmen!" vehemently ejaculated Magnus Balveny, as with a lion's courage he defended himself: "it was not my fault! Ye are traitors to your lord the Earl!—ingrates to me, your Captain!"

"Down with him! smite him! crush him!" were the savage adjurations addressed from one to another; and blow upon blow rained furiously on Balveny.

The conflict was fierce, but necessarily brief: for he was hemmed in by his infuriate assailants. His sword snapped in twain—his helmet was knocked off: he was now at their mercy. Sinking upon his knees, that mercy did the wretched man implore—but all in vain.

"Serve him as the victims of his folly or his knavery have been served!" ejaculated the oldest of his assailants.

The proposition was at once comprehended by the rest, in all its terrible significance. They seized upon Balveny: desperately did he struggle—but it was useless. They bound his arms behind him—they passed a cord about his neck; his cries were suddenly stifled—inexorable were they—and they hung him to the bough of a tree.

Then away they sped, firmly believing that they had executed a righteous punishment on one who by his treachery or his ignorance had proved the cause of direst calamities.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ENGLISH KNIGHT.

It were useless to dwell upon the excitement produced in all the immediate neighbourhood of Roslin Castle by the attempt on the part of the Douglas Borderers to surprise that fortress; but we may observe that this amount of sensation was sustained in proportion as the details of the whole affair transpired, and when it became known how signally the lawless servitors of the Black Earl had been baffled and punished. Infinite praise was bestowed

upon Margaret for her presence of mind in having taken the measures requisite for the protection of the castle so soon as she had become aware of the fact that the armoury was peopled with living beings concealed in the iron panoplies: her courage rendered her an object of admiration on the part of the male sex and of wonder on that of the female; and, in a word, she was looked upon as a perfect heroine by every one whose ears the narrative reached. Young Seton was sent off with letters to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan at Hermitage Castle, informing him of all that had just occurred at Roslin, but likewise conveying the assurance that there was no need on this account for him to quit his own domain with the idea that his assistance might be required elsewhere, inasmuch as in this last phase of the feudal strife which was now waging against the Roslin family, the Black Douglas was again compelled to behold the signal discomfiture of his vile treacherous projects.

A report of the entire transaction was drawn up and forwarded to the King at Holyrood Abbey; and an immediate reply was vouchsafed by David to the Earl of Caithness, to the effect that his Majesty would pay an early visit to Roslin to learn the amplest details of this new offence on the part of the Douglas, so that he might take cognizance thereof at the same time when that nobleman should appear before the throne of Royalty to answer whatsoever charges might be laid against him by the Lady Elvira Ramsay. But we must remark that this letter which the King so promptly addressed to the Earl of Caithness, announcing a speedy visit to Roslin, intimated the royal pleasure to the effect that this visit should be paid under a sort of *incognito*, so that there was to be no pomp or ceremony in the reception which the Sovereign expected to experience at the castle. That was the royal command; and the Earl of Caithness was bound to hold it in due regard—although he would fain have made such arrangements as should enable him to display the splendour, wealth, and influence of the great Scottish Peer when entertaining the Monarch. Indeed, although there was no gathering of the tenants and vassals of Roslin on the occasion—no assembling of a number of guests to share in the honour conferred by the expected visit of Royalty—yet in every other sense were preparations made for the amplest development of the hospitalities of Roslin. All luxuries that gold could purchase were procured for the banqueting-table; and the costliest stuffs—satin, velvet, and brocade—were obtained from Edinburgh to embellish the apartments which King David was to occupy during his sojourn at the castle.

Margaret comprehended full well that the alleged object of the royal visit—namely, the investigation of all the details of the recent adventure with the Borderers—was but a pretext for the fulfilment of the promise he had made her in a recent billet. She was now supremely happy: she regarded David's conduct as a signal proof of his love, his honour, and his good faith: she thought within herself that the time could not by any possibility be far distant when he would openly acknowledge her as his Queen; and she even went to the extent of determining that on this occasion they should not separate without coming to some positive understanding on the point. Under the pretence of saving her friend Albertina as much trouble as possible,—for the young lady's nerves were much shaken by the excitement of recent occurrences,—Margaret superintended all the decorations and embellishments of the state-apartments; so that the Earl of Caithness enthusiastically applauded her zeal in assisting to give effect to the reception

which the Scottish Sovereign was to experience at Roslin.

It was on the fifth day after the adventure with the Borderers that the arrival of the Monarch was expected; and his letter had further intimated that "it would be somewhere about the hour of eleven in the forenoon he should have the pleasure of grasping the hand of his right trusty and well beloved the Earl of Caithness." Most auspiciously did the sun appear to dawn on this particular day: unclouded was the azure sky; and all nature in that summer season seemed to wear an aspect as replete with countless smiles as the bosom of a lake when it reflects the glancing sunbeams in its myriad ripples. Shortly after the morning repast was disposed of, a small party rode forth from Roslin Castle. This little cavalcade comprised the Earl of Caithness, Sir Casimir D'Este, the Lady Albertina, and Margaret,—attended by some half-dozen squires and pages, amongst whom was the Teutonic Knight's faithful follower Jassent. The Earl of Caithness was attired in a courtly costume of the most sumptuous description: Sir Casimir was likewise apparelled in a style befitting the occasion: Albertina looked surpassingly interesting and exquisitely lovely in the rich but elegant and tasteful riding-dress which set off the perfect symmetry of her slender shape: but there was something truly grand and imposing, and even queenly, in the aspect of Margaret, whose raiment was of the simplest and most unpretending character, and who therefore had evidently considered that the glory of her own beauty was a sufficient adornment. The attendant pages were all apparelled in the richest manner, and their steeds were caparisoned with a corresponding costliness. Thus, altogether, the cavalcade, though a small one, seemed well fitted to honour the expected arrival of the Scottish Monarch.

Having crossed the stone bridge, the little party pursued their way up one of the ascending paths of the glen; and in a few minutes they reached the high ground which lay beyond. They rode leisurely forward for about half-an-hour, until at some little distance another party of horsemen was descried, and the Earl of Caithness at once exclaimed, "Ah, there is the King! His Highness has anticipated by a full hour the moment when according to the royal missive his presence might be expected!"

"Yet methinks it is not the King," interjected Sir Casimir D'Este: "for he who rides in advance of the rest, assuredly has not the stature of your monarch."

"No," said Margaret; "it is not the King. Besides, this little cavalcade is not approaching by the route which his Highness would take in coming from Edinburgh."

"True!" cried the Earl of Caithness: "it would rather appear as if these travellers whom we behold, had come from a southern direction. At all events they are assuredly making for Roslin. Let us therefore in all due courtesy advance and see what their object or business may be."

The little party which had thus been descried, consisted of five individuals: one, riding a little way in advance, was evidently the principal personage—the other four being his attendants. Two of these had the air of youthful pages, and they rode together at an interval of some dozen paces behind their master. The remaining two, who brought up the rear, were elderly men—their ages exceeding fifty: they were well armed—they were mounted on powerful steeds—and each led a sumpter-horse bearing one of those small compact mail-trunks, or portmanteaus, which were used in those times for



the conveyance of the wardrobes of travellers in easy circumstances.

But let us be a little more explicit in our description of the party whom we are just introducing upon the scene. Nothing could exceed the interesting appearance of the personage who rode in advance, and who was evidently of gentle birth—while his golden spurs denoted him to be at least of knightly rank, though his manner, bearing, apparel, and entire aspect would have warranted the idea that he was even of far higher distinction. When seen from a little distance, he appeared to be but a mere stripling of some seventeen or eighteen, from the total absence of moustache, whisker, or beard: but on a nearer view this almost feminine juvenility of countenance was lost and absorbed in the development of more masculine indications. In other words, the chin, the lower part of the cheeks, and the upper lip showed the bluish tint of a beard that was indeed naturally strong, but which was shaven quite close, and even with a precision so exceedingly nice and fastidious that the whole of the lower part of that countenance appeared perfectly smooth to the view. That bluish tint, as it ascended up the cheeks, was absorbed in the healthful hues of the general complexion, where the embrowning influence of the summer's sun mingled with the mantling of the rich red blood through the skin. The features were of a somewhat strong aquiline prominence, but finely chiselled, and presenting a remarkably handsome profile. The lips were full, well-shaped, and of a vivid red; and when smiling—as they habitually did—they revealed two rows of teeth as white as ivory. The whole expression of that countenance was a mingling of joyousness and intelligence, as if the natural happiness of the heart were sustained and re-acted upon by the acquired resources of the mind. There seemed to be a remarkable candour in the large full blue eyes; and this air of frankness was perhaps enhanced by the height of the forehead, which was as smooth as if neither care nor indisposition had ever made an attempt to trace a line upon that brow nor ruffle its surface. The dark brown hair clustered in natural curls about the well-shaped head, the masculine beauty of which was set off by a velvet cap surmounted by a single crimson feather. We have said that when seen at a little distance, the stranger looked like a stripling of eighteen; but on a nearer view the impression produced was that of four or five and twenty,—until that velvet cap was gracefully raised in salutation, and then the glossy richness of the clustering brown hair gave back the aspect of juvenility to the whole countenance; so that indeed it became a difficult matter to conjecture what might be precisely the age of the personage whom we are describing.

He was not above the medium stature—or to be still more precise and particular, his height was about five feet eight inches. His form was slender, without leanness; and as he sat upon his steed, his shape seemed of a lithe and willowy elasticity. His costume was elegant but manly, and becoming the knightly rank which his golden spurs indicated. A hauberk or surcoat composed of small steel rings—better known as chain-armour—fitted his body with a sufficient degree of tightness to develop the perfect symmetry of that shape, and yet with a sufficient degree of ease to permit that form the enjoyment of an elastic freedom. So light and flexible was this surcoat that it seemed to be a mere web of steel upon the person of its wearer: but the eye of a connoisseur could not fail speedily to discern that the most exquisite artistic skill had been brought to bear upon this piece of workmanship to render it proof, and that in every respect it was one of the finest specimens of an English armourer's handicraft.

For at that period the English far transcended the Scotch in the manufacture of martial panoplies and accoutrements; and such a beautiful sample of steel network as the hauberk which the stranger wore never was made north of the Clyde.

And that he was an Englishman there were other indications—such for instance as the predominance of the red and blue colours in his scarf, in the trappings of his steed, and also in the costume of his dependants. But reverting especially to himself, we should add that all the remainder of his apparel was rich and elegant; while his mien had a gay rollicking joyousness blending with the consciousness of rank and position, perhaps too of good looks,—a certain dignity and pride, mingling with all the freshness of a young man's candour and affability,—in short, much if not everything to interest and please all persons with whom he might come in contact. He bestrode a bright bay steed, which by its unparalleled beauty in all points seemed admirably well fitted to carry such a rider; and if on the one hand the animal appeared proud of the burden that it bore, on the other hand its master seemed by the mingled elegance, gracefulness, and firmness of his seat to deserve the character of an accomplished equestrian.

Having said thus much of the principal personage of the little party, it remains for us to speak a few words in reference to the followers. We have already stated that two young pages rode in immediate attendance upon him, and that at a short distance two elderly lacqueys, who also served as an armed escort, had charge of the sumpter-horses. The pages seemed to be mere boys, of fourteen or fifteen years of age; they were both remarkably good-looking, though with somewhat pale and delicate countenances, producing the impression that their service was rather too arduous, and that in following their master they had to travel further and faster than was altogether consistent with the physical capabilities of their stripling years. However, as interesting a pair of pages were they as ever attended upon a still more interesting master; and if their countenances were somewhat pale and delicate, their looks were nevertheless joyous—the sunny light of happiness shone in their eyes—and as they conversed in undertones together, a peal of merry laughter frequently rang forth, and often so unrestrained in its silvery merriment as to reach the ear of their master, and cause him to glance round with a look that was slightly deprecating, but by no means angry. As for the two elderly lacqueys, we have already said pretty nearly enough concerning them; and we need only add that their looks were demure, but expressive of discretion and fidelity: they rode on for the most part in silence, each leading the sumpter-horse laden with the mail-trunk or portmanteau.

We have now fully described the little party which was advancing in the direction of Kioslin, and towards which the cavalcade of the Earl of Caithness was drawing near. When but a narrow interval remained betwixt the two parties, the interesting stranger lifted his cap in graceful salutation, and said in a voice that was most pleasing and harmonious in its full rich tones, "As a meet preliminary to the question I am about to put, permit me to announce myself as Sir Louis Caryon; and though without presumption I may add that my name is not indifferently known in my own native England, yet on the other hand I have not the vanity to suppose for a single instant that it enjoys any repute on this side of the Cheviot Hills."

It was with an air of mingled dignity and frankness—a youthful off-handedness blending with the perfect ease and self-possession of one who had seen

the world—that Sir Louis Carlyon made this speech.

"It is not the repute of every good and worthy name that travels far," said the Earl of Caithness, with a courteous smile; "and your distinguished appearance, Sir Knight, is sufficient to convince us that you are all you represent yourself."

"And if not," resumed Sir Louis Carlyon, "I have those credentials about me which will doubtless prove a passport to the attainment of my objects. Where be these despatches? Ah, here!"—and unfastening the lid of a little leathern box, four inches wide and about half a foot in length, which hung at his saddle-bow, he drew forth a small packet of papers.

A slight contemptuous sneer for a moment flitted over the lips of Sir Casimir D'Este, as his eye glancing into that little leathern case, caught a glimpse of several phials of perfume and small ivory-boxes, the fashion of which indicated that they contained unguents for the hair or some kind of cosmetics. But that supercilious expression almost immediately vanished from the features of the Teutonic Knight, as he thought within himself, "He is a frank, out-spoken, chivalrous-looking young man—aye, and of a veritable manly appearance likewise, now that I behold him nearer!—so that I must not set him down as the mere scented cumb or perfumed dandy, simply because I catch sight of oils and unguents in his possession."

Meanwhile Sir Louis Carlyon—either unconscious that the contents of his little leathern box had been discerned, or perhaps utterly indifferent whether they were or not—was looking in a calm leisurely way over his papers, just as if he himself had plenty of time to spare and therefore thought that no one else could have any reason to be hurried.

"No—this is not the missive," he said, musing audibly: "it is my letter of credit on one Archie McDougal of the Cannongate in Edinburgh—doubtless a good man and solvable? This should be it? No! 'tis a list of the various sites and spots which I purpose visiting—"

"For what document, Sir Knight," inquired the Earl of Caithness, "may it be that you are seeking?"

"Ah, behold it!" ejaculated Sir Louis Carlyon. "Mark the superscription! 'Tis from the Right Honourable the Earl of Morton, to his equally Right Honourable friend and kinsman the Earl of Caithness. And now that I have given you some proof of my good faith and gentility, I would put the question to which I ere now alluded, and inquire if I have not the honour to speak to the Earl of Caithness himself?"

"Even so," responded that nobleman with a smile: "and therefore I may at once receive and open this letter which you bear from my kinsman the Earl of Morton. But how came you, Sir Knight, to form the conjecture that you were speaking to the Earl of Caithness?"

"In good sooth, my lord," answered Sir Louis with that tone and manner of his which were alike so frank and so replete with an exquisite polish, "it needed not any special exercise of the ingenuity to conjecture that a distinguished-looking personage, riding with a fitting *cortege* in the neighbourhood of Roslin, might very well be Roslin's lord himself—the more so as your noble kinsman the Earl of Morton, with whom I recently parted at merry Carlisle, gave me certain particulars—"

"Enough, Sir Knight! I comprehend!" interrupted the Earl of Caithness, who by this time had opened—and was beginning to read the letter from the Earl of Morton.

We must explain the nature of the contents of this epistle. The Earl of Morton was, as the reader has seen, a kinsman of the Earl of Caithness: but he was several years younger. He possessed considerable estates; and he was likewise the owner of the Castle of Dalkeith, in the town of the same name, and only a few miles distant from Roslin. For some years past he had resided altogether in England, in consequence (as it was rumoured) of an unfortunate, or even degrading and dishonourable marriage which he had contracted, but the particulars of which were by no means generally known, at least not in Scotland. In former times the Earl of Morton had been much devoted to his kinsman, the Earl of Caithness; and the latter, while deploring the unhappy alliance which his relative had contracted, was too generous-hearted to forget the intimacy and the friendship of earlier years. Thus, when Sir Louis Carlyon presented the Earl of Morton's letter, the Earl of Caithness received it with the urbane courtesy which we have noticed. The letter was purely and simply one of introduction on behalf of Sir Louis Carlyon. It represented that Knight as being desirous to visit some of the most memorable spots, scenes, and sites in Scotland, and especially to sojourn for a few weeks either in Edinburgh or its neighbourhood. The Earl of Morton's letter went on to say that his lordship would have cheerfully placed his Castle of Dalkeith immediately and at once at Sir Louis Carlyon's disposal, only that he feared it was scarcely in a fitting state to receive one who by his own wealth and position was accustomed to every comfort and luxury. The Earl of Morton therefore requested that his beloved and respected kinsman the Earl of Caithness would vouchsafe the hospitalities of Roslin Castle to Sir Louis Carlyon, either during the English Knight's sojourn in that neighbourhood, or else until such time as adequate preparations could be made at Dalkeith for his reception. The letter passed high eulogies upon the honourable character, the chivalrous disposition, the brilliant intellect, and the polished manners of Sir Louis, whom indeed it went so far as to hold up as the very model of an accomplished gentleman and gallant knight of the Southron clime. In conclusion, the Earl of Morton proffered his congratulations on the return of the Earl of Caithness and his family to Scotland: he expressed likewise his regret "that circumstances, to which he then would not more particularly allude, prevented him from hastening personally to Roslin Castle to give verbal utterance to those felicitations."

Having perused this letter, the Earl of Caithness proffered his hand to Sir Louis Carlyon, saying, "Most welcome, Sir Knight, are you upon my domain, and a welcome guest will you be at Roslin for so long a period as it may list your views and inclinations to tarry there. Through regard for my kinsman's recommendation, and through friendship already experienced for yourself, I say the longer such sojourn may last the better."

Sir Louis Carlyon expressed due acknowledgments for the kind welcome which he thus received; and the Earl of Caithness then proceeded to introduce him to the ladies and to Sir Casimir. Scarcely was this little matter accomplished, when Margaret exclaimed, "Here is the King!"—for carried away by a paroxysm of enthusiasm, she forgot at the instant the necessity of maintaining a perfect control over her emotions.

That little transient betrayal of excitement passed, however, without attracting any particular notice—unless indeed it were on the part of Sir Louis Carlyon, who surveyed Margaret attentively for nearly a minute, as she, unconscious of the cir-

cumstance, was gazing in the direction whence the King and his attendants were now approaching.

"His Majesty," observed the Earl of Caithness, now deeming it necessary to give some little explanation to the English Knight, "is about to honour my castle with his royal presence—"

"In which case, my lord," said Carlyon, with the most good-tempered frankness, "I may prove an interloper or an intruder—I may be one too many; and not for worlds would I suffer your generous hospitality to put itself to an inconvenience. Let me proceed to Dalkeith. The chambers there may not be in excellent order—but it will be a marvel if I cannot shift to make myself at my ease—"

"Not so, Sir Louis!" interrupted the Earl of Caithness: "there is ample accommodation at Roslin—and you shall not go to Dalkeith."

"I will remain at Roslin therefore," said the English Knight,—"which for many, many reasons will be more agreeable than the solitude of Dalkeith."

As he gave utterance to this latter part of the sentence, the elegant and accomplished young English Knight glanced in a complimentary manner towards Albertina and Margaret: but his eyes rested lingeringly upon the countenance of the latter—and then his regards travelled slowly over her entire form, as she sat upon her steed with the dignity of an Amazon and embellished with all the noble beauty of Diana the Huntress. As his looks were re-travelling towards her face, Margaret happened to glance upon him: their eyes met for a moment—and Margaret was struck by the peculiar expression which shone in the full clear blue orbs that were fixed upon her. Her own looks were instantaneously withdrawn:—another moment, and the little incident itself was banished from her memory—for the King, attended by a small suite, galloped up to the spot.

David was dressed in a somewhat plain, but elegant travelling-costume: there were none of the insignia of royalty about him; and he came attended by only half-a-dozen followers, none of whom were above the rank of court pages and valets. Stephen Cochrane was not however amongst them: for this worthy was absent at the time upon some special service of a delicate and secret nature, and therefore requiring all the talent and skill of an individual so astute and unprincipled as himself. However, leaving Master Cochrane to his task, whatever it might be—and perhaps thereof the reader will hereafter learn—we must revert to the King's arrival at Roslin, for the purpose of observing that the plain, simple, and unostentatious manner in which he came fully indicated the seriousness with which he had intimated to the Earl of Caithness his desire to maintain a species of *incognito*, or at all events to lay aside the dignity of the monarch for the present and play the part of any other friendly guest.

Most gracious and affable was King David in returning the salutations of the Earl of Caithness—most courteously gallant to the Lady Albertina—most polite and friendly in his outward bearing towards Margaret—most urbane towards Sir Casimir D'Este. These salutations having passed, the King bent his looks upon Sir Louis Carlyon, and then turned them upon the Earl of Caithness, as much as to inquire who the distinguished young stranger was.

"This is Sir Louis Carlyon—an English Knight of good name and repute," said the Earl. "He comes well introduced and highly recommended to me; and with your gracious Majesty's permission he will be my guest at Roslin."

"Ask not my permission, my dear Earl," exclaimed the King, smiling: "you have a right to

dispose of your hospitalities as you think fit. Besides, in the present instance I question if they could be more eligibly accorded."

The King, who seemed determined to be in a good humour with everything and every one, smiled most affably and graciously upon Sir Louis Carlyon as he thus spoke; and the young English Knight acknowledged the salutation with a courtesy which though respectful, was yet associated with a sufficiency of well-bred self-possession to prove that this was not the first time he had found himself in the presence of Royalty, and that he therefore was not overawed or dazzled by it.

The three parties—namely, the Earl's, the English Knight's, and the King's—now amalgamated, so to speak, and proceeded in a body towards Roslin. The King was for courtesy's sake compelled to ride next to the Lady Albertina; and Sir Louis Carlyon became the temporary companion of Margaret. At first Margaret was slightly pre-occupied; for she was thinking within herself how cruel it was that she, the Queen, should be compelled to give place in that cavalcade to an Earl's daughter—and that instead of having her own husband by her side, she was thrown into the companionship of a stranger. She however resolved that no length of time should now elapse ere she placed herself in a different position, and that she would not suffer the King to quit Roslin again until he had arrived at some positive, specific, and satisfactory decision with regard to the time, place, and occasion of her recognition as Queen of Scotland.

We said that at first Margaret was pre-occupied when she found herself in the society of Sir Louis Carlyon: but he went on conversing with as much ease, fluency, and apparent satisfaction to himself as if he knew that he had an attentive listener, or as if she kept answering his observations. But not many minutes elapsed before Margaret began to perceive that her companion kept on talking away:—by degrees her attention was attracted to what he was saying—and presently she grew absolutely interested, if not absorbed, in the discourse. No—not *absorbed*, because she had too many objects of another nature for her thoughts to allow them to concentrate upon a comparatively unimportant topic: but *interested* she assuredly was—and no wonder! Sir Louis Carlyon's discourse was full of entertainment: to many it would have proved absolutely fascinating. He spoke on a variety of subjects—but calmly and deliberately—not jumping abruptly from one to another, nor displaying any pedantic design to show himself versed in more topics than one. His manner was apparently without any pretension: indeed it was with an air of the most charming simplicity that he sustained the discourse without absolutely monopolising it. Nothing could exceed the well-bred ease as well as the intellectual facility with which he passed from topic to topic. He spoke of the English court,—rapidly but graphically sketching the most eminent personages, male or female: then, having casually observed, in consequence of some remarks presently made by Margaret, that he had recently visited the lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland, he gave the most exquisite description of the most salient points of that incomparable assemblage of English scenes. It was without the slightest affectation as well as without an effort—with a natural fluency, and in the most harmonious tones of a voice that was fine and rich, though not particularly strong—that Sir Louis Carlyon rendered his conversation as instructive as it was interesting, and at times even fascinating—while it was a veritable artistic skill with which that power of word-painting in respect to personages and scenes was exercised.

But on this subject we may perhaps have more to say hereafter: suffice it for the present to observe that whatever idea Margaret might have at first formed of Sir Louis Carlyon when she caught his eyes riveted, as she fancied, somewhat audaciously upon her countenance, her favourable opinion was completely won by the time they reached Roslin Castle:—that is to say, she could not help acknowledging the young English Knight to be one of the most intelligent, elegant-mannered, and entertaining cavaliers she had ever in her life encountered.

Two days after the arrival of King David and Sir Louis Carlyon, with their respective followers, at Roslin Castle, Sir Casimir D'Este took his departure in order to pay another visit to Melrose Abbey. He however promised the Earl of Caithness to return to Roslin at the expiration of a week or ten days; for he intimated that the affairs which had originally brought him to Scotland, were not as yet approaching a termination, and that therefore the delay left him the leisure to pay these several visits and avail himself of hospitalities which were accorded in so friendly a style. On the other hand the Earl of Caithness vowed that he lay under numerous obligations to the Teutonic Knight, and that the various incidents which had occurred since their acquaintance first commenced, had established ties between them which were even stronger than mere ordinary friendship, and had placed them upon terms of a species of fraternal intimacy. Sir Casimir replied in a suitable manner: and accompanied by the kind regards of all at Roslin, the warrior set off for Melrose.

Ten days more elapsed; and now Sir Casimir D'Este prepared to redeem his promise and set out on his return to Roslin Castle. To this proceeding he was the more particularly impelled on account of a letter which had just reached him at Melrose Abbey, after having been previously sent to Roslin. It was from the pen of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan; and therein the young Knight stated that having now completed all the arrangements which he had to make in respect to his domain of Hermitage, he should depart in the course of a day or two on a visit to Roslin. Sir Casimir was pleased at the prospect of so soon beholding his young relative; and therefore was it that having bid an affectionate adieu to his brother the Abbot Benedictus, the Teutonic Knight set out on his return to Roslin Castle.

It was between four and five o'clock in the evening, when Sir Casimir, followed by Jassent, came within sight of the towers of Roslin. A few minutes afterwards the stalwart warrior became aware that a couple of horsemen were riding at a tolerably rapid pace at some little distance; and they appeared by the direction which they were pursuing, to be making for the same destination as himself—namely, Roslin Castle. The thought struck Sir Casimir that the foremost of the two riders might possibly be Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan; and the keen eye of the Knight soon discovered that such was the fact. On the other side our young hero in his turn recognised his excellent friend Sir Casimir; and the meeting soon took place. Warm were the greetings which were exchanged; and they rode on towards Roslin together, Jassent and young Seton following at a short distance. For it was the faithful page Malcolm who was in attendance upon Sir Fleming, and who had been sent back from Roslin to Hermitage with the letters conveying an account of the transactions with the Borderers.

The circumstance of Fleming having galloped forward to meet the Teutonic Knight, had caused them to encounter each other at a spot whence a path led into the glen at a different point from that which was usually taken by those who were going to or from

the castle. The winding path in the glen itself was much more precipitous than the usual route: but as it led to the same destination and the Knights were not timid horsemen, they hesitated not to pursue it. They were proceeding along the outskirts of one of the thick woods which fringed that side of the glen when on reaching an angle formed by the configuration of the grove, they suddenly stopped short, drawing in the reins of their steeds—for a ghastly spectacle met their view.

It was the hideous object of a man suspended to the bough of a tree!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CONVERSATIONS IN THE GLEN.

ALTHOUGH little more than a fortnight had elapsed since the man was suspended there, yet was the countenance already much disfigured, for the carrion-birds had been pecking at it. It was not therefore easy to recognise the features: but the apparel of the individual speedily afforded an indication of who he was.

"This has been a deed of vengeance, no doubt!" exclaimed Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan.

"Yes—possibly," answered Sir Casimir D'Este,—unless indeed it were the work of brigands: for look you, Fleming! that helmet gaping with gashes—and that broken sword—"

"True!" cried our hero. "But Ah, Sir Casimir! look at the plaid of the man's skirt! 'Tis the Douglas tartan!"

"And that armour!" exclaimed the Teutonic Knight. "Ah! and that countenance too!—I begin to recognise it!"

"'Tis Balveny!" ejaculated Sir Fleming.

"Yes—'tis Balveny!" exclaimed young Seton, who now galloped up to the spot in company with Jassent. "I should know my old enemy from amidst a thousand! Ah, he has met retribution at last!"

"A carrion-acorn hanging to an oak-bough!" interjected Jassent.

"But this was not done by your orders, Sir Casimir?" asked Fleming: "you did not take Balveny prisoner? At least in the descriptions written to me at Hermitage, no such intimation was given—"

"Nor did any such event occur," replied Sir Casimir. "Balveny was not amongst those who stealthily entered the castle. On the contrary, we were positively informed by some of the prisoners that he was in personal command of the strong force of reserves concealed in these woods."

"His death is involved in mystery," observed Fleming: "but at all events it was a righteous retribution for his misdeeds, let it have come as it may! Still this is by no means a sightly object to hang in the shade of a wood; and if Margaret or the Lady Albertina, or any of the female dependants in Roslin, had chanced to stumble as we have done on the ghastly spectacle, the effect might have been serious."

"True!" observed the Teutonic Knight. "Jassent, cut down the corpse and bury it—But no! conceal it in yonder thicket until the dusk, when you may return and drag it down to the Esk."

This latter mandate was given because at the instant Sir Casimir D'Este caught a glimpse of persons, amongst whom were ladies, walking along a path lower down the glen; and Sir Fleming perceiving them at the same moment, ejaculated, "How fortunate that they did not take it into their heads to walk this way!"

The two Knights rode onward, down the declivitous path—while Jassent and Seton remained behind to cut the corpse from the tree and conceal it for the present in the midst of a neighbouring brake. The two squires then rejoined their masters, who by this time were close by the spot where the persons whom they had seen in the glen were now waiting for them. These persons—or rather personages we should say—were the King of Scotland, the Earl of Caithness, the Lady Albertina Roslin, Margaret, and Sir Louis Carlyon.

Sir Casimir D'Este and Sir Fleming Fitz Allan dismounted from their steeds, and gave them in charge to Jassent and Seton. Our young hero—having made his obeisance to the King, and pressed the hand of the Earl of Caithness to his lips—embraced his sister Margaret, whom he had not seen since he had set off on the expedition which resulted in the capture of Hermitage Castle. Margaret's heart glowed with joy and her bosom swelled with a twofold triumph, as she thought within herself, "I am a Queen, and he is Lord of Hermitage! Ah, and full soon now shall the day dawn for my acknowledgment as David's bride and Scotland's ruling princess!"

Having embraced his sister with all the ardour of his fraternal fondness, Fleming Fitz-Allan turned towards Albertina; and to his lips did he raise her hand with as much outward respect as he had ere now lifted that of her sire—but glances of significant tenderness were rapidly exchanged between them. Sir Louis Carlyon was then introduced to Fleming; and in the meanwhile the Teutonic Knight had paid his respects to the King, and had exchanged kind salutations and words with the friends whom he thus rejoined at Roslin.

"What think you of the English Knight, Fleming?" inquired Sir Casimir D'Este, presently taking an opportunity to put this question aside to our hero.

"Although the atmosphere is perfumed around him, as if he had just issued forth from a lady's boudoir," replied Fleming, "yet do I admire his appearance well enough—and I think I shall like him. I do not however judge hastily in any way. Still there is a certain air of frankness about the Southron Knight which pleases me. True, there is a dash of conceit in his demeanour—a savour of fastidiousness in his apparel—and an infinitesimal accent of self-sufficiency in his tone: but all these little foibles are absorbed in the generous candour which shines in those blue eyes and sparkles in those sunny smiles. Besides, there is something so joyous, so free, and so natural in his merry laugh, that it is impossible not to like him for that buoyancy of spirits which to my mind is ever an indication of the absence of bad thoughts and evil passions."

"You have delivered me a complete essay, my dear Fleming," said the Teutonic Knight, smiling: "but it is nevertheless one to which it is a pleasure to listen—for methinks that your estimate is correct and true."

At this moment the King called to Sir Casimir D'Este to give some little piece of information in respect to a point of foreign policy which had arisen in discussion between his Majesty and the Earl of Caithness. The Teutonic Knight accordingly joined the Monarch and the nobleman on the spot where they had halted; and Margaret now suddenly bounded forward, and caught her brother Fleming by the arm: for at that instant Sir Louis Carlyon was in discourse with Lady Albertina Roslin.

"My dearest, dearest brother," said Margaret, in a voice that was low but musically tremulous with

joy, while a kindred animation appeared upon her superb countenance and a bright illumination shone in her large coal-black eyes—"my dearest, dearest brother! This is the first time that by word of mouth I have had an opportunity of felicitating you on the immense successes you have achieved and the grand changes that have taken place in your destinies! But why, Fleming—Oh, why did you not come in a manner as befits the great feudal lord you now are?—why with only the attendance of a single page? And then too, the dangers you incur from the hatred of the vindictive Douglas—"

"Look, Margaret!" interrupted Fitz-Allan; "behold the escort which attended me from Hermitage until within a dozen miles of Roslin, when impatient to see you all, I rode on in advance—and then I fell in with Sir Casimir."

As Fleming thus spoke, he indicated a troop of six well-mounted and well-armed warriors, who were descending a distant pathway of the glen in the direction of the stone bridge.

"Ah, 'tis well, dear Fleming!" said Margaret: "that is as I could wish! Assume everything that becomes your rank—display your wealth—you exercise grand seigniorial rights—and doubtless, Fleming, doubtless in a short time the King will convert your knighthood into a barony, and you shall hear resounding through the air the swelling titles of 'my lord' and 'your lordship!'"

Margaret was hurried onward by her enthusiasm: she felt herself at the moment to be a Queen—she was thinking as one—and almost speaking as one sufficiently to betray something or to excite a suspicion in her brother's mind. He gazed upon her with increasing astonishment: he fancied that she was carried away by her joy at his own good fortunes; he believed she was giving rein to a fervid imagination—and that, flattered by the friendship of the King, and the sort of intimacy upon which all the circle at Roslin stood with Scotland's Monarch, she supposed that there was now sufficient interest to demand and to obtain any favour at the hands of Royalty. But at that instant an almost maddening recollection flashed to his mind; and clutching his sister forcibly by the wrist, he murmured in an altered and hoarse voice, "You forget, Margaret, that we stand upon a mine which may at any moment explode! We have enemies as active as they are bitter—as shrewd and vigilant as they are remorseless and implacable; and if it were only breathed on the gentlest zephyr that we bear the proscribed and branded name of *Loyie*, all these smiles of fortune would turn into the darkest frowns—castles, estates, and domains would be swept away—and while I should exchange the proud halls of Hermitage for a dungeon, you, my poor Margaret—you, my sweet sister, would be torn from the saloons of Roslin to languish likewise in a prison-cell!"

Indescribable was the calmness with which Margaret listened to this troubled and agitated speech; for she was proudly conscious of the power of being enabled to say to her brother that all these fears were vain and that from the royal lips a favourable pledge had already gone forth. But the moment for such a revelation had not yet come; and on this topic she dared not for the present speak. Fleming, as he regarded her, thought that she deeply felt all he said, and that it was despair which rendered her thus mute, thus calm—despair mingling with consternation, and both characterized by a blank imperturbability.

"Fleming," she said, suddenly breaking silence, and raising her large luminous dark eyes towards him, "do not speak thus ominously! Have you not in your soul the presentiment that all will thrive

with you—that success and prosperity will attend on all your proceedings——”

“Yes, yes, Margaret!” exclaimed the young Knight; “such is indeed the general tone of my feelings—such the tenour of my thoughts and hopes! But still there are moments when terror smites me and brings as it were a dark cloud down to overshadow me!”

“This must not be, Fleming,” said Margaret; “this must not be! Rise high above that cloud of gloom and doubt!—soar boldly upon eagle’s wings into the smiling heaven of the present, and it will continue to smile upon you for the future! Fleming,” she continued, in a slower and somewhat more serious tone, “our’s are no ordinary destinies—and we ought not to be surprised at anything which takes place to elevate us—to shower honours upon our heads—to surround us with wealth—and, in a word, to crown us with prosperity! If but a few weeks back any one had told you, Fleming, that you might go boldly forward and demand of the Earl of Caithness the hand of his daughter in marriage, you would have shaken your head mournfully—you would have asked what hope there was for the poor obscure Knight, bearing a fictitious name and dependent on that Earl for the very bread he ate? But now, Fleming, how different is it! Are you not the owner of noble domains on the banks of the Liddel—have not your heroic deeds rendered you the pride of Scottish chivalry—are you not free to range the vast forests of Eskdale—are you not Lord of Hermitage——”

“Margaret, Margaret!” said the young Knight, smitten with a sort of awe and wonder as his memory instantaneously suggested a comparison between the words which his sister was speaking and that mystical chant which he had heard in the vaults of Roslin Castle. “Is it at random that you are thus speaking? or must I believe there are point and purpose in your allusions?”

“Yes, dearest brother,” responded Margaret, leaning upon his arm and looking with enthusiastic admiration up into his countenance, “there are both point and purpose in the words that I was speaking. Listen, Fleming! Some little while ago I had a dream. A beauteous vision appeared to me—a heavenly apparition——”

“A vision, Margaret?”—and the young Knight quivered all over with suspense.

“Yes, Fleming—a vision,” she continued, as if not perceiving the extent of his emotion: “it was a beauteous female form, clothed in white drapery—her head covered with a snowy veil. And methought that you likewise stood before me——”

“Ah!” ejaculated the youth, almost breathless with suspense. “Proceed, Margaret—proceed!”

“Yes, dearest brother—such was my vision,” she continued; “and then methought that the beauteous female apparition, apostrophising yourself—or rather, I should say, your image which was conjured up—addressed you in a poetic chant that was sweetly solemn.”

“Good heavens, Margaret! is this possible?” murmured Fleming. “And you dreamt all this?”

“Or else, my dear brother, how could I tell it to you?” she asked, with a sweet smile, which for a moment was almost playful: but instantaneously becoming serious again, she said, “If it were not a mere dream, Fleming, I would repeat the lines—for they are indelibly impressed upon my memory. But you would only smile incredulously—you would say that I am silly and superstitious——”

“No!—by all the Saints, no!” exclaimed our young hero: “I will not deal thus lightly with the subject! Repeat me the chant, Margaret!—repeat it, I beseech you!”

His beautiful sister remained silent for a few moments, as if she were assuring herself that memory served her faithfully in reference to the prophetic chant: and then she began to repeat those very verses which had before been wafted in sweet solemn harmony to the ears of the astonished and awe-inspired listener.

“Knight of St. Michael’s cross of gold,
Knight of St. Andrew’s Order bold,
Beneath whose spear in tourney rolled
The Paladin of France!—
Hero, without ancestral name!
Despite a heritage of shame,
Dost thou create thine own fair fame
With falchion and with lance!”

“Young warrior! who in grand career
So bravely bore the quivering spear,
And met with heart that knew not fear

“The Douglas in his rage!
Be thou the chief on Liddel’s side,
Or Teviot’s chivalry the pride,
Ranger of Eskdale’s forests wide,
And Lord of Hermitage!”

“Avert thy right and brook not wrong,
Be ever in thy purpose strong,
And swerve not as thou speed’st along
In this career of thine:—
Then brighter yet, O youth! shall be
The day-star of thy destiny:
And Roslin’s virgin-rose for thee
Shall with thy laurels twine!”

When Margaret had ceased, a deep silence reigned between the brother and sister for upwards of a minute; and then Fleming, slowly turning his eyes upon Margaret’s countenance, said in a voice that was half-solemn, half-joyous, “There is something of superstitious truthfulness in all this, my beloved sister, which can neither be rejected nor disbelieved! Yes!—for there are certain reasons——But no matter! Suffice it, Margaret, for you to learn that I do regard that chant with all the faith and hope and reverence due unto prophecy itself! Henceforth, Margaret, so far as its fulfilment depends upon myself, there shall be no want of energy, firmness, and resolution towards the accomplishment of my destinies!”

“Well and bravely spoken, Fleming!” replied Margaret. “And now go and join Albertina. I will draw Sir Louis Carlyon aside from her company;—the King, the Earl, and Sir Casimir are at some distance in the rear;—you may enjoy unrestrained some sweet discourse with her whom you love.”

The brother and sister accordingly retraced their steps for a short interval, and thus rejoined Albertina and the English Knight.

“Sir Louis,” said Margaret, smiling affably, “you have not forgotten your promise to give me a description of that tournament at Oxford, wherein, as you modestly admit, you bore a certain part, but in which I feel convinced that you nobly signalized yourself.”

“If my poor descriptions will for a moment afford pleasure to the beauteous Mistress Margaret,” replied the English Knight, with a most courteous inclination of the head that was so gracefully poised upon the slender symmetrical form, “I place myself entirely at her service.”

“Let us walk this way, Sir Knight,” said Margaret. “We will leave my brother and the Lady Albertina together; for while you narrate the history of the tournament at Oxford, Fleming will describe to his own companion the sterner circumstances of the part which he bore in the storming of Hermitage.”

“And what, beauteous lady,” said Sir Louis Carlyon, as he slowly passed away with Margaret beyond ear-shot of the two lovers whom she had purposely thrown together, —“and what, beauteous lady, if instead of reciting deeds of tilt and tour-

ney, conflict and arms, I were to crave your attention to a softer and more tender tale?"

"In that case, Sir Louis," interrupted Margaret, affecting to treat the topic gaily, as if it were mere complimentary language on his part. "I should declare the infinite preference which I entertain for the more thrilling narrative of deeds of chivalrous emprise."

"And if, beauteous Margaret," rejoined the English Knight, with a bland and exquisite self-possession, "I were discourteous enough to persist for the nonce in choosing my own topic?"

"It were most unlike a gallant knight for you to do so, Sir Louis," said Margaret, somewhat seriously.

"It were most unlike a fair lady for you to refuse to listen to such a tale," responded the Englishman: and now it struck Margaret that there was a certain self-sufficiency, assuredly conceited and almost flippant, in his tone.

"In good sooth, Sir Knight," she exclaimed, with an air of the loftiest dignity—for it was one of the moments in which she remembered that she was a queen—"you seem resolved to push this jest to an extreme which is scarcely warranted by the brevity of our acquaintance. Remember, Sir Louis—"

"I remember full well, beauteous Margaret," interrupted the English Knight, "that I have only known you for a dozen days: but yet I love you as if I had known you for as many years."

This was said quietly, and without the slightest demonstration of the enthusiasm of that passion which the words themselves seemed, or at least affected, to convey. Margaret bent a look of mingled anger and astonishment upon Sir Louis; and she now for the first time observed something in the expression of his countenance which made her start as if a strange idea had suddenly smitten her.

"Yes, believe me, my dear Margaret," he continued, with an increasing familiarity, "I not only love you, but I swear that you shall love me in return!"

She looked at him fixedly in the face: she then muttered to herself, "No—ridiculous! impossible!"—and then again arming herself with the most dignified hauteur, she said, "Sir Louis Carlyon, you are insulting me with the most unpardonable grossness."

"Believe me, beauteous Margaret," he said, throwing the most exquisite courtesy into his tones and the most brilliant polish over his manner, "it is impossible that I could act with grossness. I tell you, Margaret, that I love you—I have sworn that you shall love me in return—Oh, believe me, I am serious!"—and yet there appeared to be a playful irony in his tone, a good-natured mischievous mirthfulness dancing in the depths of his large blue eyes, and a smile of arch meaning playing upon his admirably shaped mouth.

Again did Margaret fix her eyes earnestly upon his countenance:—then she averted them in bewilderment, and remained silent.

"Yes," he continued, in the same tone of half-seriousness, half-levity, "I love you, dear Margaret—and you shall love me in return! I will cast a spell upon you, so that even if you love another,"—and here he chuckled musically as well as with a sort of mischievous significance for a moment—"your love shall still be given unto me. Oh, you know not my power!—and it is a power, dearest Margaret, all the more dangerous because it is wielded under circumstances of mystery!"

"Who are you?" demanded Margaret, suddenly stopping in the midst of the shady path which they

were slowly pursuing; and now she fixed her large black eyes more searchingly, more scrutinizingly, more penetratingly than before on the marvellously handsome countenance of that elegant and interesting young Englishman.

"Who am I," he said, with a low ironical but good-natured laugh: "who should I be but Sir Louis Carlyon, Knight of the Order of St. George—owner of heaven only knows how many hides of land, and possessor of I remember not how many marks a year! Do you like the description, sweet Margaret?—or do you take me for a bandit in disguise? Ah! that would be indeed exquisite!"—and the young Knight laughed merrily, thus displaying the two rows of beautiful ivory teeth, pure, faultless, and unblemished.

Margaret continued to regard the mysterious individual in silence: some idea was evidently agitating vaguely in her mind—but again she suddenly seemed to repel it; for she muttered to herself, "No! the thought is absurd! It is impossible!"

"I have told you who I am," resumed Sir Louis Carlyon, with a tone and manner that might be taken for good-tempered bantering; "and next I may tell you what I will do. I repeat, dear Margaret, that I will throw my spells upon you—you shall learn to love me—a single word spoken in your ear will have the magical effect of a talisman—you shall throw yourself into my arms—aye, and what is more, you shall consent to flee with me!"

Again was Margaret earnestly scrutinizing the countenance of the young English Knight:—gradually did the animation of intelligence spread over her own features, as if the idea which had previously been hovering vaguely in her brain, was now growing clear, lucid, and distinct:—yet once more did she become altogether serious, haughty, and mistrustful, as if a cloud had suddenly enveloped her; and she said with even the sternness of command, "A truce to this child's play! Tell me who you are? and tell me what you mean?"

A smile of liveliest gaiety played upon the English Knight's red lips, and an arch look of good-tempered mischief beamed in his full blue eyes as he bent forward and whispered something in Margaret's ear.

"Ah!" she ejaculated, in a tone vibrating with joy. "Is it indeed so?"—and she threw herself into the arms of Sir Louis Carlyon.

"I told you how it would be, dear Margaret," he said, as he kissed her upon both cheeks. "I love you—I loved you from the first moment I beheld you—and you must love me in return!"

"Yes—I will love you," replied Margaret, as she disengaged herself from the young Knight's arms.

At the same instant an ejaculation burst from the lips of both; for at a little distance along the shaded pathway—transfixed in astonishment to the spot, but with the hue of anger rapidly mounting upon his cheeks—stood the Earl of Caithness, a spectator of the scene!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FLIGHT.

THE King, the Earl of Caithness, and Sir Casimir D'Este had been walking together, discussing political matters, while Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and Albertina roamed in one direction, and Margaret with Sir Louis Carlyon strayed in another. Presently the King began to question Sir Casimir in reference to the character and disposition of Prince de Sulza,



No. 18.—MARGARET.

Grand Master of the Teutonic Order; and as the Earl of Caithness had on several former occasions conversed with Sir Casimir on precisely the same topic, he did not think it worth while to tarry for the purpose of hearing it descanted upon again. His lordship therefore left the King and the Teutonic Knight together, while he rambled elsewhere to join any others of the party whom he might first chance to fall in with. He turned into one of the pathways of the glen: he pursued it for some little distance—he heard voices speaking, though he could not catch what was said—he continued his way, until a turning in that path brought him suddenly within view of the English Knight and Margaret. And behold! Sir Louis Carlyon was straining the young lady in his arms and imprinting kisses upon her cheeks!

No wonder that the Earl of Caithness was suddenly transfixed to the spot with amazement, or that the blood of indignation should begin to mantle upon his countenance. It was not that he considered it at all unnatural that a handsome young Knight and a beautiful lady should fall in love with each other: nor was it that he had any matrimonial views in store for Margaret: but his anger was excited because he was at once struck with the idea that there was something indiscreet or indelicate in Margaret having listened to the love-tale of one with whom she had not as yet been acquainted a fortnight, and who was therefore comparatively a stranger to her.

Ejaculations had burst from the lips of Sir Louis Carlyon and Margaret the instant they caught a glimpse of the Earl of Caithness; and then the young Knight indulged in a merry peal of laughter, —but averting his animated countenance so that the nobleman should not perceive what levity he was treating the incident; and he was likewise careful that the laughter itself should be so subdued as not to reach the Earl's ear.

"For heaven's sake be serious!" said Margaret, almost angrily. "The position is most embarrassing —unless indeed you will take it upon yourself to give some explanation——"

"Leave it all to me, my dearest Margaret," was Sir Louis Carlyon's rapid yet collected reply, at the same time that his look all in a moment became serious, and he flung his regards towards the Earl of Caithness.

"Be discreet—be consistent!" rejoined Margaret, with a still more rapid utterance; "and for heaven's sake compromise nothing!"

"Beat you a retreat in another direction towards the castle," said Sir Louis; "and leave me to manage the Earl."

Margaret accordingly turned somewhat abruptly away, while Sir Louis Carlyon advanced to meet Lord Caithness, who was himself now moving forward from the spot where for some few moments he had been completely transfixed. His countenance was severe—the flush of anger was upon it—and his right hand even made a movement towards his sword-hilt, as he said in a curt decisive tone, "Sir Knight, it were almost an insult to everybody concerned, to ask whether it be a tale of honourable love which you have been breathing in the ear of Margaret Fitz-Allan?"

"As you, my lord, have brought her up from infancy, and have so generously supplied the place of her natural protector, you have a right to assume a paternal position; and I therefore am bound to answer your query with all readiness as well as with all truthfulness. Yes, my lord—I love Mistress Margaret in the most honourable sense and meaning of the term. Indeed it is utterly impossible I can love her otherwise!"

As Sir Louis Carlyon thus spoke, his clear blue eyes were fixed with an expression of the most ingenuous frankness upon the Earl's countenance, and his demeanour altogether was such as to win the entire confidence of that nobleman. Every remnant of anger's mantling hue fled from the Earl's features; and grasping Carlyon's hand, he exclaimed, "I ought to have awaited nothing less than this chivalrous candour and manly frankness on your part!"

"To see Margaret is to admire her," said Sir Louis; "and where two hearts incline towards each other, esteem and admiration speedily expand into warmer feelings."

"True!" said the Earl of Caithness. "I presume therefore, Sir Louis, that you had been seeking the opportunity of avowing your sentiments to Margaret——"

"Yes, my lord," responded the English Knight: "I avowed my sentiments——"

"And I need not ask," rejoined the Earl, with a significant smile, "whether your affection be reciprocated? I beheld enough to convince me that your love is not thrown away upon one who knows not how to love in return. In short, Margaret has consented to accompany you to the altar—is it not so?"

"Yes, my lord—she will accompany me," responded Sir Louis Carlyon,—"whithersoever I choose to lead her," he added in an undertone, and with a smile of mischievous mirthfulness flitting over his handsome countenance.

"It is my duty to inform you, Sir Louis Carlyon," resumed the Earl of Caithness, "that Margaret has no dower which can properly be called her own——"

"Believe me, my lord," interjected Sir Louis, "I never for a moment thought of any dower."

"It is generous of you to say so, Sir Knight," replied the Earl; "but I have not finished my sentence. I was about to add that though Margaret herself has no dower which can properly be called her own, yet shall she not go as a portionless bride to the altar. Her brother has just inherited wealth; and I on my part——"

"I vow, my lord," exclaimed Sir Louis Carlyon, "that the beautiful Mistress Margaret shall never receive aught in the shape of dower from her brother or yourself to accompany me to the altar!"

"Such generosity on your part," rejoined the Earl of Caithness, "must in some sense be reciprocated by Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and myself. Rest assured, therefore, that we shall do our duty. I believe, Sir Knight, you are wealthy—you possess fine domains—at least to such an effect did my kinsman the Earl of Morton write——"

"And he told your lordship the truth," interjected Sir Louis Carlyon. "But look you, my Lord of Caithness! I understand well what is passing in your mind—or at least what ought to be passing there; for you have the welfare of Margaret at heart, and you are bound as her protector and her guardian to see that she take no step which may be inconsistent with propriety and prudence."

"You are speaking, Sir Knight, in a strain as sensible as it is honourable," said the Earl of Caithness; "and I thank you for having at once brought the discourse to this point."

"When explanations are to be given," said the English Knight, "it is better to volunteer them at once, than to require that they should be elicited in painfully slow details. Now, my lord, I know very well that I presented myself at Roslin with an ordinary billet of introduction, which suited well enough the purpose of proving my rank and station, and that on the score of gentility I was fitted to become your lordship's guest. But now circumstances have

altered; and you require to know more of me. In plain terms, you have a right to expect that I shall prove my name to be unblemished, my repute to be of the best, and that my estates in Middlesex, Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire, consist in verity of good broad acres and are not the chimeras of imagination."

The Earl of Caithness was prepared to learn that Sir Louis Carlyon was in very excellent pecuniary circumstances; but he was seized with pleasurable amazement, and even startled, at the impression produced by this mention of domains in so many of the finest English counties. Yet it was with the most unaffected modesty that Sir Louis Carlyon had thrown out those allusions: it appeared the simplest and most natural proceeding on his part, as that of one who having the consciousness of great wealth and being accustomed to the enjoyment of it, was utterly above all idea of making it a subject of mere idle vaunt or boast.

"To-morrow, my lord," resumed the English Knight, "I will put you in possession of certain documentary proofs—and I will furthermore give your lordship a list of names in the English metropolis to whom reference can be made; and thus, as I am prepared to take every step which is consistent with my own honourable feelings and your lordship's completest satisfaction, I would solicit in return——"

"Ask whatsoever favour you will, Sir Knight!" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness, who was delighted with the straightforward, candid, and business-like dealings of the handsome young Englishman.

"It is simply this, my lord," rejoined Sir Louis,—"that for the present the entire subject of our discourse may remain in privacy and secrecy; for I cannot fail to acknowledge that a courtship should experience a longer duration than a dozen days or so, ere it be proclaimed to the world."

"I altogether coincide with the opinion which you have expressed, Sir Knight," responded the Earl of Caithness; "and I will retain the seal of secrecy upon my lips for the present."

By the time this point in the discourse was reached, the Earl and the English Knight had emerged from the shady pathway; and perceiving all the rest of the party at a little distance, they at once began to touch upon a new topic.

In the meanwhile Margaret, when abruptly breaking away from Sir Louis Carlyon in order that he might deal as best he could with the Earl, had turned into a diverging path, which led through a portion of the grove and then emerged upon an open space of the glen. Just as she reached that open space, Margaret beheld Sir Louis Carlyon's two young pages seated upon the grass under the shade of a tree. She had never noticed them with any particular degree of attention until now: but on the present occasion she stopped for a few moments to regard them; and a smile, singular in its expression, came over her countenance. The pages were not immediately aware that any one was nigh, or that observing eyes were fixed upon them: but when Margaret emerged from the shade of the grove and was passing near them, they both started up and made her a respectful salutation. She continued her way; and not choosing to interrupt the interview between her brother and Albertina, she joined Sir Casimir D'Este and the King. Some ten minutes afterwards the Earl of Caithness and Sir Louis Carlyon made their appearance; and Margaret perceived at a glance that the young English Knight had succeeded in satisfying the nobleman. For the Earl spoke to her with his accustomed kindness; and there was nothing significant in his looks or speech—for he did not choose

to do aught which, as he fancied, might plunge Margaret into confusion and embarrassment. It was a sly arch look which Sir Louis Carlyon flung upon the young lady: his handsome blue eyes were glistening with a mischievous merriment—so that Margaret herself smiled for a single instant—but it was almost imperceptible; and then she darted a severe look at the young Knight, as much as to bid him curb his gay and sprightly humour somewhat, for fear lest he should betray whatsoever secrets lay betwixt them.

On the following morning King David took his departure from Roslin Castle, attended by the small suite which had accompanied him thither. Most urbane and affable was the Monarch in paying his adieus to his noble host and to that Earl's lovely daughter, Albertina: most friendly likewise was he to Sir Casimir D'Este, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, and Sir Louis Carlyon:—indeed he appeared to have taken quite a liking to the well-bred and polished young Southron. Towards Margaret the King's manner was outwardly that of courtesy and friendship; and it was therefore under such an aspect that he bade her farewell in the presence of the rest. But their adieus had been previously said in private; and there was neither unhappiness nor disappointment in the bosom of Margaret on this occasion of the King's departure from Roslin.

In the course of that day Sir Louis Carlyon fulfilled his promise to the Earl of Caithness by placing in that nobleman's hand a list of high personages in London, to whom reference might be made on the young Knight's behalf; and the Earl conceived that Margaret had every possible reason to rejoice at the excellent match which he supposed she was soon to form. Naught beside of any consequence occurred on this particular day: but the ensuing one was destined to prove memorable in the narrative which we are recording.

After the morning-repast, on the special day of which we are about to write, the Earl of Caithness and Sir Casimir D'Este proceeded together to the armoury, to inspect three or four cases of newly-manufactured weapons which had arrived on the previous evening from Edinburgh, and which Redman by his noble master's permission had ordered. Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and the Lady Albertina walked together in the grounds attached to the castle. Some hours passed; and at length the youthful lovers began to wonder what Margaret had all this time been doing.

"It is not well of us," said Albertina, "to leave her so entirely to her own resources; for it is possible that she may be alone."

"Methinks, dearest Albertina," answered Fleming, "that we left Margaret with Sir Louis Carlyon——"

"But what if Sir Louis Carlyon," interjected Albertina, "thought fit to accompany my father and Sir Casimir D'Este to the armoury, to see the weapons which have arrived from Edinburgh——then poor Margaret would be altogether alone!"

"Ah, true!" said Fleming. "Yet, after all, Sir Louis Carlyon is too courteous a Knight not to have bestowed his companionship upon my sister. However, we will hasten and see where Margaret is."

The youthful lovers returned to the suite of sitting-rooms ordinarily used: but they found neither Margaret nor the English Knight. The Earl of Caithness and Sir Casimir D'Este now made their appearance from the armoury, where they had been for the last three or four hours, but during which interval they had seen nothing of Sir Louis Carlyon. Albertina repaired to Margaret's chamber: but she was not there. The young lady

was turning to leave the room and seek her friend elsewhere, when a billet lying upon the table caught her eye. It was addressed to Albertina's self. Up to this point she had not entertained the slightest idea of anything wrong: but when she beheld that folded billet, and saw that it was directed to herself in Margaret's well-known writing, Albertina felt suddenly frightened—though she knew not at what. She tore open the note, and found its contents to be as follow:—

"Be not alarmed, my ever dearest Albertina—thou whom I love with all the fondness of a sister!—be not alarmed at my abrupt departure! You know me too well to believe for an instant that I could dishonour myself; and therefore it were an insult to my own fair fame to do more than record the assurance that my withdrawal from Roslin is a step taken in all propriety and delicacy, though in secrecy and stealthiness. Let no one mistrust me! Not you, Albertina—nor your noble father—nor my high-minded brother—nor the generous-souled Sir Casimir D'Este! In three or four days all mystery will cease; and then, believe me, there will be wonder, and admiration, and joy! More for the present I cannot say—unless it be to enjoin and recommend that no evil construction be put upon any circumstances attending my departure; but rather let all judgment be suspended—unless indeed a full, implicit, and generous reliance can be reposed on my avowment that there is naught degrading nor dishonouring in the step which I have taken. Show this billet, dearest Albertina, to those whom its contents may concern; and believe me ever your affectionate

"MARGARET."

It was with a species of consternation that Albertina perused this note; and there was such confusion in her thoughts that she could scarcely understand aught of its meaning beyond the one fact that Margaret had fled from the castle. She tottered to a seat, on which she sank down. She pressed her hand to her brow—she read the billet again; and then she rushed wildly from the chamber, to the apartment where she had left her father, Sir Casimir D'Este, and Fleming. They were startled and amazed at the manner in which she burst into the room: but the truth was soon revealed—Margaret had fled! Good heavens!—fled? Yes!—there was the billet, in her own handwriting! Indescribable was the excitement which seized upon Fleming, and which was indeed largely shared by the Earl of Caithness and the Teutonic Knight.

"Fled!" cried our young hero, scarcely knowing what to think between the fact itself on one side, and the assurances contained in the billet on the other side. "Fled! Whither? Why? With whom?"

"By St. Andrew!" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness, "if the English Knight have done this—"

"Hah!—what, my lord?" cried Fleming. "Sir Louis Carlyon—"

"Where is he?" ejaculated the Earl of Caithness. "If he be here, of course 'tis well! But if not—"

Fleming Fitz-Allan waited not to hear the remainder of the sentence: he rushed from the room—he precipitated himself down the staircase—he flew to make inquiries. The answers were speedily given. Sir Louis Carlyon and Mistress Margaret had ridden forth together soon after the morning-repast: the Knight's suite, consisting of the two young pages and the two elderly valets, had followed soon afterwards—somewhat indeed to the astonishment of the domestics who beheld the departure, for they had previously received no notification that Sir Louis Carlyon's sojourn at Roslin was so near its close. The sumpter-horses and the mail-trunks were gone likewise: but in respect to

Margaret the menials of the castle thought that she was merely going to accompany the Knight for a short distance upon his journey in whatsoever direction it might lead.

Such was the intelligence which Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan obtained; and he rushed back in a half-frantic state to the apartment which he had so recently left.

"My wretched sister!" he exclaimed: "has she been beguiled by that perfumed and scented English coxcomb?"

"Ah then it is so!" ejaculated the Earl of Caithness; "and I also have been deceived and duped!"

"You, my lord?" cried Fleming.

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret!" murmured Albertina: and she sank back half-fainting upon a seat.

"Let us speed in pursuit!" exclaimed Sir Casimir D'Este. "Doubtless the false traitor of a Southron will purpose to bear his prize into England—"

"Oh, yes! let us speed in pursuit!" vociferated Fleming. "Come, Sir Casimir! While our steeds are being caparisoned, we will buckle on our armour!"

This was done accordingly; and in less than a quarter of an hour the two Knights were galloping forth from Roslin Castle. The stone bridge was crossed; and up the acclivitous side of the glen they dashed,—Jassent and Seton following at a little distance. They reached the summit of the glen—they were about to dash down the slope leading towards the plain and take a direction due south—namely, towards the English border—when they perceived a warrior in armour galloping towards them upon a steed which was flinging the foam from its mouth. He wore a shirt of mail; and the effigy of a lion rampant was blazoned on the chest of that surcoat of chain armour.

"By St. Andrew, it is the Earl of Bassentyne!" exclaimed Fleming Fitz-Allan, at once recognising that armorial blazonry.

Sir Casimir and our young hero accordingly reined in their steeds; for the idea naturally flashed at once to their minds that Roland had some intelligence to impart in respect to Margaret, and that hence the frantic excitement with which he was riding. Not that they knew anything of his love for Margaret, nor aught of what had passed between them: but they conceived that he had seen something wrong, and that as a friend of the family he had come to communicate it.

"Whither away so fast, Sir Casimir?" exclaimed the young Earl; "and you too, my dear friend Fitz-Allan? But Ah! your looks are wild and excited—"

"And your's too, Roland!" ejaculated Fleming. "What—what—"

"The most hideous treachery has been played me!" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne,—"a treachery so foul—"

"Ah! treachery?" echoed Sir Casimir: "treachery everywhere! But Margaret—"

"My beloved sister Margaret!" cried Fleming,—"have you seen her?"

"Margaret?" ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne, who was utterly ignorant of her perfidy towards himself. "Margaret? Good heavens! has any evil—"

"She has fled, Roland!" vociferated Fleming, with a wild fierce bitterness: "she has fled with a scented fop of a Southron!"

"Fled? Margaret fled!" murmured the young Earl, in utter consternation; and he seemed as if he were ready to drop from his horse in dismay.

"Yes—fled!" cried Fleming; "and we are in pursuit! Farewell, Roland! Come, Sir Casimir!" "No!—by heaven we part not thus!" exclaimed the young Earl. "I join in the pursuit! Yes—" and he was about to give vent to some bitter reproach against Margaret's name, when the natural generosity of his disposition prompted him to demand, "But are you sure—are you confident that appearances may be trusted?"

"Oh, only too well!" ejaculated Fleming. "Come quick! we lose time! They have several hours' start of us—"

"Which direction?" asked the Earl of Bassentyne.

"Towards England, we opine," responded Fitz-Allan; "but we have no certainty on the point."

"Yet if we do get upon their track," interjected Sir Casimir, "we shall assuredly overtake them; for they will be delayed and hampered by the couple of led sumpter-horses—"

"Unless indeed," cried Fleming, "the false Knight and my wretched sister ride fast and far in advance of the two young pages and the two valets with the sumpter-horses!"

"What!" ejaculated Roland, literally bounding in his saddle as he reined in his steed; for himself and the two Knights were just setting off together in full career in a southern direction. "Two young pages?—mere striplings, with surcoats of blue and red?"

"The same! the same!" ejaculated Fleming.

"And two elderly knaves, having the air of half-lacqueys, half men-at-arms, leading sumpter-horses?"

"Again, again the same!" cried Fitz-Allan. "But the false Knight himself—a well-looking young man—whose age somewhat defies the guess—"

"Five or six and twenty when seen close!" interjected Sir Casimir. "This morning he was apparelled in a rich hunting suit—"

"Peace! peace!" interrupted Roland: "I saw not any Knight with those pages! And think you that if I *had*, and that Margaret had been with him, I should not have tarried? Oh, yes! yes!"

The two Knights did not comprehend the true source of the passionate ejaculations which had burst from the lips of the Earl of Bassentyne; for they were all intent upon the fact that it was evident a clue had been found to the course taken by Sir Louis Carlyon's party.

"Ah! but all this is accounted for!" ejaculated Sir Fleming, fiery with impetuous eagerness to avenge himself on the Southron beguiler of his sister. "The scented coxcomb sped off with the erring Margaret a good half-hour in advance of his servitor—"

"Where did you see those servitors?" demanded Sir Casimir of the Earl.

"At Dalkeith," was the quick response; "at the gate of the castle."

"Dalkeith?" echoed the Teutonic Knight. "By St. John of Jerusalem! all this tallies exactly! The Southron came recommended by the Earl of Morton—"

"And to the Earl of Morton," interjected Fleming, "does the Castle of Dalkeith belong. One word more, Roland—"

"Not another word!" cried the Earl of Bassentyne. "Tis enough, enough! Let us away—away!"

Without waiting to hear the reasons which Roland might have for this sudden resolution on his part to proceed in a north-easterly instead of a southerly direction—but convinced from what he had already said that he knew full well the party whom they were

seeking would be found at Dalkeith, or thereabouts—the two Knights put spurs to their steeds, which at once bounded forward abreast with the foaming charger bestridden by the Earl himself. Seton and Jassent were close behind; and away they all sped as fleet as so many arrows discharged from a bow. The distance from Roslin to Dalkeith was only some seven or eight miles; and thus half the journey was accomplished before they drew bridle to afford the steeds a breathing space. Then, during this short interval, they learnt from the Earl of Bassentyne some few hurried particulars which may be briefly recorded. He had been inveigled by a false pretext on board a vessel, which had consigned him as a prisoner to the Castle of the Baas Rock. There for nearly a month he had been detained without knowing why or wherefore; and he was even still ignorant of the motive of such detention. All he knew was that the author of his calamity was the chief of the royal pages, Stephen Cochrane. But that the King himself had anything to do with the vile proceeding, was scarcely to be supposed: for what earthly purpose could the Monarch have to serve thereby? Yet all was doubt and mystery on the point! He had escaped—no matter how: it was a narrative he would leave for an occasion of ampler leisure. For the rest, he was riding to Roslin—he had to pass through Dalkeith, when he beheld those two young pages and those elderly lacqueys with the sumpter-horses, passing in at the gate of Dalkeith Castle.

These were the bare outlines which Roland had time to sketch forth; and great were the mingled astonishment and indignation of the Teutonic Knight and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan at the treatment, as odious as it was mysterious, which their noble friend had experienced. But there was now no time for discussing the matter nor commenting upon it; for their steeds had been permitted to gain breath—and on they went with renewed rapidity. In a very short time the little party entered at a thundering gallop into the town of Dalkeith.

This place, now sufficiently populous with between five and six thousand inhabitants, was even in those days entitled to the dignity of a "town;" and upon the site of the present splendid mansion belonging to the Duke of Buccleugh, stood the ancient castle belonging to the noble family of Morton. At the particular time of which we are writing, the Earl bearing that title lived altogether in England, as the reader has seen from previous statements; and a very small domestic establishment was maintained at the castle. Indeed, the greater portion of the rooms were unfurnished; and those which were habitable, were but indifferently appointed. We must however observe that the chapel, or oratory, was always carefully maintained in a state suitable for public worship; for Dalkeith was a royal burgh, of which the Earls of Morton were the hereditary Royal Baillies—and one of the conditions of their charter was that the chapel in the castle should be thrown open daily for the offices of religion to those of the inhabitants of the town who might choose to avail themselves of the privilege. There was a monastery attached to the fortalice; and with the holy brotherhood thereof was vested the care of the oratory. Thus all day long did the tapers burn upon the altar in that chapel; while matins and vespers were duly performed at the sacred fane by the friars of St. John.

Through the town galloped the arriving party; and straight to the castle they sped. The gate stood open, as from morning until evening was the custom according to the inviolable terms of the royal charter, which only permitted those portals to be closed between sunrise and sunset in cases of

war, feudal strife, or other very urgent circumstances. Thus naught barred the progress of the little troop of pursuers: over the drawbridge resounded the heavy trappings of the steeds—another moment, and the iron of their hoofs struck out the sparks upon the pavement of the courtyard.

In an instant they all alighted. Jassent and Seton were left in charge of the horses, while the Earl of Bassentyne, Sir Casimir, and Sir Fleming seized upon one of the castle domestics, who happening to be in the court-yard at the time, stood gazing in stupid amazement at this sudden inroad of the little armed troop. But he was the only individual to be seen at the moment about the premises.

"A lady has been carried off from Roslin," said the Teutonic Knight, thus at once abruptly entering upon the business; "and you will conduct us to her apartment. Not a syllable of remonstrance—not a moment of hesitation!—or you shall die as a traitor abettor of the foul deed!"

The menial—who was a mere youth of about seventeen—was frightened; and he said, with pale face and trembling lips, "Spare my life, and I will do your bidding!"

"Proceed!" ejaculated Sir Casimir. "But beware of treachery!—and remember that if you lead us into a snare, at the very first evidence thereof your life shall pay the forfeit!"

Thus speaking, the warrior drew his mighty sword—an example which was at once followed by Roland and Fleming. The menial shrank from the sight of the weapons which glanced in the afternoon sunbeams; and he led the way towards the door of the principal building. They all proceeded in silence; but the steel-clad feet of the warriors trampled heavily on the stone steps up which their guide conducted them. On reaching the landing, the menial threw open a door, saying, "You will find her there!"

The Earl, Sir Casimir, and Fleming passed rapidly into a spacious apartment, which was only indifferently furnished: but they beheld no one. There was an inner door: they tried it—it was fastened on the other side; and without a moment's hesitation Sir Casimir threw the whole weight of his colossal form against it. The door burst open with a din as if it were a battering-ram which had thus abruptly and irresistibly forced it. At the same instant, shrieks of terror, pealing forth in female voices, rang from that inner apartment into which the three warriors rushed.

There they stopped short, and glanced rapidly around. It was a spacious room—or rather bed-chamber—and somewhat better furnished than the apartment which they had just traversed. A couple of beautiful girls, whose ages might have been eighteen or nineteen, and who were elegantly apparelled, were throwing themselves in consternation into each other's arms; while at a little distance a lady, still more richly attired, and who was seated upon a sort of ottoman, was covering her face with her hands, as if likewise overcome with terror. But though the three warriors could not catch a glimpse of her countenance, they nevertheless saw enough of the general outlines of her form to convince them that she was not Margaret.

"We mean you no harm, ladies," at once exclaimed Sir Casimir: "it is not ye whom we seek! Where is Margaret Fitz-Allan?"

"Ah! here is another door!" ejaculated Fleming, rushing towards a half-drawn curtain of dingy crimson stuff, which was suspended by rings to a long rod fixed over the top of the doorway.

The girls were still screaming and sobbing: the

lady had rushed to the farther extremity of the room, where she threw herself on her knees by the side of the massive heavily curtained couch, in the shade of which she was almost completely obscured. Without waiting to pay further heed to these affrighted fair ones—nor tarrying for any answer to the question he had put—Sir Casimir rushed to the door which Fleming had just indicated. It was fastened: he tore back the curtain—and again did he dash himself with all his force against the barrier. It burst open, with a din even greater than that produced by the former exploit. And now another shriek pealed forth: this time it was only one female voice—but that voice was at once recognised.

"'Tis Margaret!" cried both Fleming and the Earl of Bassentyne, as if in the same breath ejaculating the name: and they were close upon the heels of Sir Casimir.

It was the chapel into which they had thus burst; and there, at the altar, knelt the object of their search,—Margaret, with affrighted countenance, clinging to the cloth which flowed from the high and sacred table down upon the stone steps!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ORATORIO OF DALKEITH.

FEARFULLY interesting was the scene which that chapel now presented. The terrified Margaret—not knowing who the intruders might be, but alarmed in the first instance by the entrance of armed men to the outer apartment—had ordered the inner door to be barricaded, while she took refuge in the chapel. To this there was another entrance, which might be called the public one: but that door she had also fastened, scarcely fancying that those who came would go to such an extreme as to violate the sanctity of the place. They however knew not that it was the chapel until they had burst across its threshold in the manner already described: but even if they had actually possessed a previous knowledge of the fact, there can be no doubt that under the circumstances they would have pursued precisely the same course.

And there knelt Margaret at the altar, on which the tapers were burning; and her reverted looks were fixed upon the three forms which she knew so well! If only Sir Casimir and her brother had made their appearance, she would doubtless at once have taken courage and addressed them: but the presence of the injured and outraged Earl of Bassentyne struck terror into her soul! And there stood those three martial forms, with the drawn swords in their hands: for there was something which even for the experienced and matured mind of the Teutonic Knight was solemnly awful in the spectacle of that young and beautiful woman, taking refuge as if from imminent wrath, at the sacred altar!

But as if by a common instinct they all three suddenly sheathed their weapons at the same moment; and then Fleming was the first to break silence. Stepping forward, he exclaimed in an adjuring tone, "Tell us, Margaret, that you have already knelt at this altar by the side of him with whom you fled—and all may yet be well!"

"Yes," added the Earl of Bassentyne, "give us this assurance, Margaret—and no harsh word shall be spoken in reference to the past! For those who have your welfare at heart, will sacrifice every other feeling to one of sincerest rejoicing that you may

have established your own happiness by such an alliance!"

Margaret comprehended all the noble generosity of a speech which had so deep a significance for her, while its full meaning was not understood by her brother and Sir Casimir. It was as much as to tell her that if she were actually a wedded wife—and in so wedding had followed the bent of her heart's inclinations—the magnanimous Roland would sacrifice all his own love on her behalf; and instead of giving vent to reproaches for her perfidy towards himself, he would proffer congratulations having their source from the kindest friendship. There are few hearts which will not melt when taken by surprise by the sudden demonstration of the noblest generosity on the part of another; and Margaret was thus touched. She essayed to speak—but she could not: her voice was lost in sobs—and the three warriors were smitten with the painful apprehension that guilt was in all this grief, and that she could not truthfully reply to the adjurations which had been addressed to her, by proclaiming that she was indeed a wedded wife!

"Margaret! Margaret!" exclaimed Fleming, his mind full of the most horrible apprehensions, "why do you not speak? Tell us—are you a wedded wife?"

"I am! I am!" she cried: then all in a moment recovering her self-possession and her dignity, she rose to her feet, saying in a calmer voice, "Fleming, is it possible that you could deem your sister guilty?"

"Pardon me, Margaret!" interrupted our young hero, now springing forward and catching her in his arms: "but all appearances were so frightfully mysterious!"

"Did you not see the billet which I left for Albertina?" inquired Margaret quickly.

"Yes—but it was so little satisfactory, dear sister!" rejoined Fleming: "it was only too well calculated to fill the minds of us all with apprehensions and misgivings! Wherefore should you have fled thus clandestinely? why have eloped thus stealthily? Surely, surely, Margaret, you would not bestow your hand upon any one concerning whose character you entertained a doubt?—and if therefore you were well assured of the good fame and honourable repute of Sir Louis Carlyon—But Ah! Margaret, why start you thus?"

"And why wears your countenance so strange an expression?" demanded the Teutonic Knight. "Margaret, Margaret!"

"The holy saints grant that there be naught wrong after all!" murmured Roland of Bassentyne, his looks bent with the anguish of an indescribable suspense upon her whom he had loved so fondly, but Oh, how despairingly!

"Sister, speak!" exclaimed Fleming; "what means all this terrible mystery? Has aught come to your knowledge prejudicial to Sir Louis Carlyon?—for by St. Andrew of Scotland! if that English Knight have played falsely or treacherously towards you—"

"In one word, Margaret," said Sir Casimir D'Este, now authoritatively interposing, "put an end to all suspense, and we may discuss details afterwards. You have proclaimed yourself a wedded wife. There should be a wedding ring—"

"Behold it!" said Margaret; and she extended her beautiful hand, where upon the proper finger was the plain gold ring.

"And there should be a marriage-certificate," continued the Teutonic Knight,—"and there must have been a priest to perform the ceremony—"

"There is a marriage-certificate," rejoined Margaret; "and there was a priest! The certificate is in the possession of that priest."

"No matter! if it exist it will be forthcoming!" cried Sir Casimir. "But the bridegroom himself—where is he, Margaret! If he be worthy of you—as indeed we may scarcely doubt, and as heaven forbid that there should hereafter be any reason to suspect—let him come forward, or let us seek him, to proffer our congratulations. Margaret, where is your husband?"

"Listen to me, Sir Casimir D'Este!" she exclaimed, half with dignity, half with entreaty; "listen, you also, my beloved brother!—and you, generous Earl!"—she added, flinging a rapid but significant glance upon Roland of Bassentyne. "I beseech you to have faith in me, and to tranquillize your minds with the conviction that Margaret is incapable of disgracing herself or those with whom she may be connected. I cannot to-day present you to my husband; I ask but your patience until the day after to-morrow—"

"O Margaret, Margaret!" exclaimed Fleming, "wherefore this delay, which does indeed look like subterfuge!"

"Subterfuge, Fleming?" ejaculated his sister, sudden fires flashing from her large black eyes. "No! I am incapable of it! But there are circumstances which you cannot comprehend—which you cannot even suspect—but which, when revealed, will fill you with mingled wonder, admiration, and joy—"

"O Margaret, Margaret!" exclaimed Fleming, in a voice of anguish mingled with impatience for he naturally suspected that she was sophistically repeating certain words which she had used in the billet to Albertina, and which now more than ever struck him as being specious and designing; "tell us at once, where is Louis Carlyon?—for he shall answer all these questions which you seem so mysteriously to evade!"

Thus speaking, Sir Fleming moved hastily towards the door by which he and his companions had burst into the chapel; and Sir Casimir D'Este followed him. The Earl of Bassentyne, availing himself of that opportunity, hastily accosted Margaret; and surveying her with all the respect which in the natural generosity of his heart and the propriety of his feelings he felt bound to pay the wife of another, he said, "Lady, I must believe you to be wedded, for I dare not associate any other idea with one in whom I have—no matter!—I mean in whom I have felt so deep an interest! I beseech you, speak out frankly! I fear that my presence may be a source of embarrassment to you; but on the other hand, if I were at once precipitately to withdraw, your brother and Sir Casimir D'Este would suspect that there was some secret betwixt us—whereas now they suspect nothing!—they know nothing! Therefore, lady, speak with frankness and act with candour; and fear not that I shall maliciously or vindictively interpose a word in respect to the past! No!—though you have destroyed my happiness, yet I will not become the wilful destroyer of your's!"

"Generous Roland!" murmured Margaret, bending upon him a look of most intense thankfulness: "be silent, I conjure you, in respect to the past!—be silent, magnanimous Earl, whatsoever may happen!"

"Stop, Sir Fleming!—stop, Sir Casimir!" cried the young Lord of Bassentyne, speeding after the two Knights as they were approaching the door of the oratorio. "Margaret will speak out frankly! I have reasoned with her as a friend!"

"Ah! 'tis well!" ejaculated Fleming, whose countenance indicated a stern decisiveness mingled with doubt and misgiving; and he retraced his steps towards his sister.

Sir Casimir followed; and his countenance was severe almost to sternness, but yet with a certain expression of bewilderment in it; for indeed he knew not what to think:—he chose not to conclude the worst,—and yet he was utterly at a loss to comprehend why if all were really well, Margaret should make so much mystery of it.

"I know, my dear brother—I know, Sir Casimir," resumed Margaret, "that my conduct must seem very mysterious—most unaccountable: but still I am necessitated by circumstances to crave a brief delay, until the day after to-morrow—"

"Margaret, this is ridiculous!" exclaimed Fleming passionately: "it is worse than ridiculous!—it is wickedness on your own part, and cruelty towards us! Besides, you know that to-morrow must Sir Casimir and I, together with the Earl of Caithness, set out for Dumbarton—where the day following the King is to hold his court—"

"Ah! and I have plaint to make before the King!" exclaimed Roland; "and if his Majesty purpose to hold his court at Dumbarton—and ye are to be there—I shall be there likewise!"

Margaret quivered with vague terrors; and she faltered forth, "You, my lord—plaint to make before the King?"

"Yes—I!" ejaculated the Earl; "for a month's captivity which I have endured at the instigation of one Stephen Cochrane, a servitor of Royalty,—who for some dark, deep, designing motive which is yet to be explained—"

"A month's captivity, my lord?" said Margaret, almost stupified by this announcement.

"Yes—it was even so! But enough in reference to myself!" ejaculated the Earl. "Let me beseech you, lady, to cut short this distressing scene—"

"Margaret, one word!" ejaculated her brother Fleming: "will you satisfy our minds, so that all may be peacefulness within these walls?—or will you continue thus to torture us with suspense and to mystify us with unintelligible speeches, so that you will at length compel us to seek elsewhere those responses which from your lips we cannot elicit? In a word, Margaret, if you would avoid that there should be violence in this castle, tell us everything!—or by all the saints I swear that if in two minutes hence I still remain in suspense, I will speed to seek the English Knight from room to room, and at my sword's point will I force him—"

"Fleming, I entreat—I command," exclaimed Margaret, "that there be no violence within these walls! And now, since you no longer treat me as a sister—since you look upon me with suspicion and mistrust—and since you outrage me with your misgivings, learn what my decision is! I will give no explanation—no, not another syllable, until the day after to-morrow—when I likewise shall be at Dumbarton; and it shall be there, in the presence of the King, that I will introduce you to my husband! And now let this suffice."

"Suffice?—no, never!" ejaculated Fleming, who was fearfully agitated. "It is naught but subterfuge, even as the billet you left for Albertina was full of speciousness! O Margaret, Margaret!" he added, with a passionate effusion of language, "I would have laid down my life to save you from disgrace and dishonour—I will now risk that life in forcing a traitor or a trifier, whichever he may be, to acknowledge you as his wife! Where is this Sir Louis Carlyon? I will seek him everywhere!"

"Stop!" ejaculated Margaret, as her brother was rushing towards one of the doors of the chapel: "stop, Fleming! It is useless to create a scandal in the presence of the domestics; for I declare most solemnly unto you that there is no Sir Louis Carlyon within the walls of Dalkeith Castle!"

"What?" exclaimed Fleming, hastily retracing his steps towards his sister in a renewed condition of bewilderment and indignation; "the English Knight has fled and left you behind? But this is unaccountable! it is incredible to a degree!—Unless indeed, Margaret, it be that you seek to gain time!—you wish to rid yourself of our presence! But you shall not! No—by heaven, you shall not find an opportunity of rejoining your paramour wherever he may be concealed, nor of following him if he have fled in advance!"

"Paramour?" echoed Margaret, the indignant blood flushing her countenance. "Fleming, were you not my brother—"

"Ah! you will make me curse the fact that I am your brother," he vehemently ejaculated, "and deplore that you should be my sister! But you shall be saved, if there is yet time!—you shall be rescued from the spells which a Southron adventurer has cast upon you! Oh, instead of liking the perfumed coxcomb, I should have mistrusted one whose voice and manners were too dulcet for the frankness of a noble chivalry! Come, Margaret!—back to Roslin!"

"No, Fleming!" she exclaimed, suddenly assuming a look and attitude of the most dignified firmness. "I will not accompany you."

"Ah! by St. Andrew, this is too much!" cried the youthful Knight. "You are my sister—you are younger than I—indeed I am your natural guardian—"

"Fleming, cease this language! it is useless!" exclaimed Margaret. "I am married—and my husband is now the only one who can exercise over me the authority of a lord and master."

"Then let him come forward to assert and prove his right!" retorted Fleming. "But no! Sir Louis Carlyon is not here!"

"Sir Louis Carlyon is not my husband, Fleming!" exclaimed Margaret: and then a glowing animation, altogether incomprehensible to the three warriors, overspread her countenance.

Incomprehensible indeed!—and all that was passing was most mysterious and bewildering—unless they were to account for it by the terrible conclusion that it was all subterfuge and trickery on Margaret's part. But most startling was that last announcement: Sir Louis Carlyon was not her husband! It seemed, then, as if she were now even abandoning the pretence that the English Knight had wedded her, and that she was thereby seeking to widen the arena of mystifications.

"Ah! now there remains not the faintest hope that all might yet be well!" exclaimed Fleming with mingled rage and wildness in his voice and looks. "You fled with a perfumed Southron—and yet he has made you not his wife! Oh, shame, shame, Margaret! Good heavens, that you could have sunk so low as this!"

"Brother," she fiercely ejaculated, while her eyes flashed fire and her bosom swelled as if it would burst the prisonage of its corset; "beware how you give utterance to things which may turn our love into hatred! For language, though impalpable and aerial when borne on the human breath, may nevertheless suddenly become condensed into a wall of adamant to separate those who were wont to be the nearest and dearest!"

Both Sir Casimir D'Este and the Earl of Bassentyne thought that there was something more than mere subterfuge in Margaret's conduct, and something more significant and serious than wretched trickery in her language. But Fleming was too much excited to be enabled to pause and reason with himself for a moment, or to deliberate for a single instant. His naturally mercurial disposition



No. 18. —MARGARET.

—after having been for a brief space sobered down somewhat by recent events since he set foot in Scotland—had received a terrific impulse from the occurrences that were now passing. And no wonder!—for he firmly believed that the honour of his sister was at stake! Indeed, all circumstances blended in a manner to fill him with the worst suspicions and blind him with the darkest misgivings; so that instead of beholding aught that savoured of a solemn warning in that last speech of Margaret's, he took it to be only another phase in a course of studied duplicity.

"Ah! there must be a finish to all this!" he exclaimed; "and that finish shall be now! Come, Margaret!—back, back to Roslin!"—and he advanced to seize upon her.

"Dare not lay a hand upon me, Fleming!" she exclaimed: "I am married—and the authority of a husband supersedes that of a brother!"

"Ah! would that there were indeed a husband forthcoming," cried Fitz-Allan bitterly, "to save your name from disgrace! But back to Roslin shall you speed!—and then I swear that I will rest not until I stand face to face with that false Southron who has beguiled you!"

"Fleming, 'tis false!" cried Margaret, now literally stamping her foot with impatience. "I take heaven to witness—and here, standing before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, I swear that the individual to whom you allude has displayed towards me naught but the purest sentiment of friendship. Oh, if you knew all, Fleming!—and Oh, if I dared tell you everything at this moment!"

"One word, Margaret!" said Fitz-Allan, for an instant endeavouring to exercise some sort of control over his feelings; "if that ring upon your finger be aught more than a golden falsehood—as alas! so many things are in this world!—name him who placed it upon your finger—say who is your husband!"

"The day after to-morrow, Fleming, at Dum-barton Castle," replied Margaret, "I promise that—"

"Oh!" exclaimed the young Knight, with a cry of anguish and of rage: "subterfuge and falsehood again! Miserable evasion! flimsy pretence! Margaret, as your brother I command you—and in the name of your benefactor and guardian, Lord Caithness, I adjure you—return with me to Roslin! O my sister! if you have sinned, there shall be forgiveness! Do not think, Margaret, that because now I am passionate and excited, I will treat you harshly! No, my poor sister—no! I love you—"

"Fleming, your very sympathy is an insult!—all you are speaking is an outrage!" interrupted Margaret. "Leave me, I conjure and command! This scene has already lasted too long! Yet would I not part from you in anger—"

"We shall not part at all, Margaret!" ejaculated Fitz-Allan, in the most decisive tone. "You shall back with me hence to Roslin!"

Again he rushed forward to seize upon her: but Margaret, retreating towards the steps of the altar, exclaimed, "Beware of sacrilege! This is a sanctuary, Fleming!—it is the chapel of a royal burgh!—and remember that he who dares violate the sacredness of such a fane, becomes liable to the severest penalties!"

"By St. Andrew!" ejaculated the excited young man, "if all the friars of St. John were gathered round, thundering forth their excommunications from the altar, I would not the less seize upon an erring sister and bear her back to the home from which she has fled!"

With these words Fitz-Allan extended his steel-

clad arms to wind them about his sister's waist: but she shrieked forth, "No, no!" and she clung to the embroidered cloth of the altar.

As she thus seized the drapery with sudden violence, two of the massive candlesticks, with their lighted tapers, were thrown from the altar, and they fell heavily upon the stone pavement: while the mitre, which stood upon the highest step, as indicative of the rank of the Abbot who presided over the adjacent monastery, rolled down at Margaret's feet.

"Peace, Fleming!—stand back, my young friend!" interposed Sir Casimir D'Este: "tranquillize yourself—and let me put a few questions to your sister! She knows that I am a friend—and she may not refuse to answer them."

But at this moment the door by which the three warriors had entered the chapel, and which had subsequently been closed behind them (probably by the females in the apartment adjoining), was suddenly thrown open, and the King made his appearance, with his drawn sword in his hand.

"The Blessed Virgin be thanked!" cried Margaret: and bounding towards the Monarch, she threw herself at his feet, seizing his hand, and looking up into his countenance as if to implore that he would speak the word which would save her from all further embarrassment and tribulation.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ROYAL ARBITRATOR.

THE very moment that door was thus being thrown open, the three warriors drew their swords from their sheaths; for they knew not who nor how many might be coming. But the instant the presence of the King was revealed, and that it was seen he came unattended and alone, the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, with the instinctive habit of respect for Royalty, plunged back their weapons into the sheaths. Not so Sir Casimir:—he retained his mighty weapon out of its scabbard, his hand resting upon the hilt and the point touching the floor.

"Margaret, what meant the screams which pealed from your lips?" demanded King David, who was evidently much excited as he thus burst into the oratorio: but instantaneously smitten with the necessity of adopting a particular measure of caution, he hastily raised Margaret from her suppliant posture, whispering, "I see that you have kept the secret, my beloved!—keep it yet for two days, according to thy promise!"—and then he added aloud, "Lady, wherein have these warriors outraged thee?"

"Sire," said Sir Fleming, "I need not tell your Grace that this is my sister—"

"Ah! I will not listen to the case at the weapon's point," interjected the King, thus alluding to his own sword which he still carried drawn in his hand: and he was about to return it to its sheath, when he perceived that the Teutonic Knight was still leaning upon his own naked brand. "What, Sir Casimir!" exclaimed David angrily; "is this the respect which ought to be shown to a crowned monarch?"

"Sire," answered the Teutonic Knight, firmly yet courteously, "whenever I behold a drawn sword the point of which may even for a moment have seemed to be directed against myself, I remain upon my guard. Besides, your Majesty well knows that between warriors there is a certain dignity—a proper and becoming pride indeed—which will not suffer one to sheath his sword while that of the other remains drawn from its scabbard."

"This may be the chivalrous pride and the mar-

rial courtesy which exist between warrior and warrior who may be peers and equals," responded David: "but it is otherwise, Sir Casimir, between a Monarch and a simple Knight."

It was a haughty gesture which for a moment was made by the Teutonic warrior—and it even seemed as if for that single instant he was about to hurl defiance at Scotland's King and refuse to sheath his sword until that of the Monarch was likewise restored to its scabbard. But if Sir Casimir entertained such an idea, he in a moment rejected it, —though it was with a peculiar smile wavering for a second upon his grimly moustached lip: then, in another moment, his massive weapon was sent clanging back into its iron sheath. David looked half astonished, half angry, at this lofty independence of demeanour which the Teutonic Knight had displayed: but probably the Monarch thought it expedient not to display a temper which might only lead to hostile words or at least leave irate feelings behind. It however cost him an effort to curb his emotions, for he bit his lip for a moment as he restored his own weapon to its sheath.

"Know you not, my Lord Earl of Bassentyne—and you likewise, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan," exclaimed the King,—"for in respect to Sir Casimir we may make exception and excuse,—but know ye not, I ask, that Dalkeith is a royal burgh, that the castle has its privileges, and that the oratorio is a sanctuary?"

"All this I for one know, sire," exclaimed Sir Fleming; "and I beseech your Highness to believe that naught disrespectful on my part was intended towards your gracious Majesty."

"I can believe it, Sir Fleming," responded the King, with an urbane courtesy. "Lady," he added, turning with the most exquisite politeness to Margaret; "permit me to hand you to a seat. You are agitated and excited—"

"Oh, sire!" hastily whispered Margaret, "put an end to all this! Let not the blush of shame linger upon my cheek! let not the scorpion of mistrust gnaw at the heart of my noble brother!"

"Patience, Margaret!—patience only until the day after to-morrow!" answered the King, likewise speaking in a low voice. "If I am about to make sacrifices for you, my beloved, you must make sacrifices for me! Leave me to deal with your brother and his comrades—and keep the secret for the present!—I charge you to keep the secret for the present! And now seek the Countess—"

"I will not leave the chapel, sire," said Margaret: "I will remain here to listen to whatsoever passes."

David bit his lip for a moment, as if he liked as little as might be this display of self-will on Margaret's part: but the next instant composing his features, he murmured, "Well, be it as you will, dearest!—only keep the seal of silence upon your lips!"

Sir Casimir D'Este, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, and the Earl of Bassentyne had remained standing together at a little distance, while the King conducted Margaret to a seat; and there he appeared to converse with her for a minute or two with an air of courtier-like politeness—so that it was utterly impossible for those three warriors to suspect that there was any secret understanding betwixt Margaret and the Scottish Monarch. David now turned towards them, saying, "It does really seem as if your presence had most cruelly excited and agitated the fair Margaret: but she assures me that she has a complete explanation—"

"Sire!" ejaculated Margaret, starting up indignantly from her seat; "this is not the strain of language—"

"Margaret," hastily whispered the King, turning towards her; "remember that there are considerations on my side as well as on your's!—remember also the solemn promise which you gave me! Be cautious, dearest—I conjure you!"

"Doubtless his Majesty is giving my sister some excellent advice," observed Fleming, in an undertone to Sir Casimir D'Este and the Earl of Bassentyne.

"But how came the Monarch here at this particular juncture?" asked the Teutonic Knight, rather in a musing and deliberate strain than because he fancied that either of his comrades could answer the query.

"'Tis strange!" thought the Earl of Bassentyne; but he did not give verbal expression to the idea: indeed there was a species of vague bewilderment in his mind, enveloping a suspicion which like the faintest thread of light was beginning to flicker through that cloud.

It almost seemed as if the King at the moment anticipated what was passing in the thoughts of the warriors; for again turning towards them, he said with an air of the most off-hand frankness, "It is singular that having to visit my faithful burgh of Dalkeith this day—and on alighting, as is my wont, at the monastery, where the holy fathers make an entertainment befitting Royalty,—it is strange, I say, that on such an occasion I should learn that friends whom I esteem were in the castle, and that when passing into the fortalice to greet them, I should find that they were gathered tumultuously in the chapel! Ah, what would the holy fathers say if they knew that there had been drawn swords here?—and what will they presently say when they enter and behold their desecrated altar?"

The explanation of the King's presence in Dalkeith Castle, was volunteered with an appearance of so much ingenuous frankness that it was completely plausible: and an additional colouring of truthfulness was given to the tale by the art with which his Majesty wound up by a sort of rebuke for the desecration of the oratorio. Fleming was more than ever convinced that the King's intervention was now entirely that of a friend. Sir Casimir D'Este was satisfied; and Roland of Bassentyne beheld no longer in his mind that little thread-like gleam of suspicion which for an instant had flickered through the doubt and bewilderment of his thoughts.

"Sire," said Sir Casimir D'Este, now taking the part of spokesman, "I submit that there are great allowances to be made in the present instance—"

"Well, well," said the King, smiling affably: "I will take care that there shall be no scandal on account of what has happened; and I will guarantee to make your peace with the holy fathers of St. John. But now, touching and concerning the motive and cause of your presence here, and why it is that I find the beauteous Mistress Margaret—"

"Sire!" she ejaculated, again half starting from her seat, while the indignant blood mantled and crimsoned upon her countenance: but she sank back again, murmuring to herself, "Whether it be to day, or whether it be the day after to-morrow, is but a matter of a few hours more or less; and soon—full soon shall my royal husband speak of me as becomes a Queen!"

"Patience!" said the King, glancing towards the lady and smiling pleasantly. "Ye of the fair sex must ever interpose your word, even when your friends are striving to manage matters for the best! But my time is more or less precious; and I would fain bring the pending matter to a conclusion—no doubt an amicable one! Speak you, Sir Casimir

D'Este!—you have calmness and discretion, and can tell the tale without excitement."

"Sire," responded the Teutonic Knight, "it is simply the case of a sister who has fled from her home, under circumstances which, to say the least of them, are marvellously suspicious."

"Look, sire!" ejaculated Fleming, presenting a billet; "here is a note which my sister left upon her toilet-table! It is addressed, as your Majesty will perceive, to the Lady Albertina Roslin!"

"The King is welcome to peruse the billet," said Margaret, now speaking with a calm dignity; "and in his royal presence may I repeat a portion of that note—the part which says that in a few days all mysteries will cease, and then there will be wonder, and admiration, and joy!"

"Ah! is the billet so worded?" ejaculated the King, who was in reality most bitterly annoyed at the strain in which Margaret had thus written; but he endeavoured to conceal his vexation beneath a smiling aspect and the affectation of a good-humoured chuckle. "Well, perhaps the fair lady"—for he would not again venture to call her *Mistress Margaret*, for fear of evoking an outburst of the storm which he saw was with difficulty restrained,—“perhaps this fair lady may have some grand surprise—”

"Let her proclaim it! let my sister satisfy me and my friends," exclaimed Fleming, "that it is in an honourable condition we find her here! She declared herself to be wedded!—she fled from Roslin with Sir Louis Carlyon—and yet almost in the same breath she assures us that Sir Louis is not her husband!"

"Ah, here indeed be mysteries!" ejaculated the King. "And so the pretty English Knight figures in the romance?"

"Sire!" was the indignant whisper which was wafted to David's ear.

"Trust to me, fair Margaret," said the King, turning towards her with an affable inclination of the head,—“trust to me to judge your case impartially:”—and he spoke quite audibly to all.

At this moment the door by which the three warriors had burst into the chapel, and by which the King had subsequently entered, was opened gently and cautiously: and the youthful domestic who had in the first instance yielded to the terror of Sir Casimir's menaces, now peered into the oratorio.

"Hah! who intrudes!" ejaculated the King.

"I earnestly crave speech with the good Knight Sir Casimir D'Este," said the youthful domestic.

"With me?" exclaimed the Teutonic Knight. "I will hear what the youth may have to say."

Sir Casimir accordingly issued from the oratorio: but we shall not immediately follow his footsteps—we must continue to rivet the attention of the reader upon the scene that was passing within that chapel itself.

"Now, having thus far learnt the particulars of this day's narrative of events," resumed King David, "and constituting myself a judge and a friendly arbitrator in the affair, I would earnestly recommend that you, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan suspend your judgment in reference to your sister. Your friends likewise will suspend theirs; and at her own convenient time may she perhaps satisfy you—"

"Perhaps, sire?" ejaculated Margaret, her eyes flashing indignantly: "did you say *perhaps*?"

"I admit, fair lady," replied the King, "that it was not courteous nor seemly for me to introduce the word *perhaps* at that particular part of my speech."

"No, sire!" exclaimed Margaret; "for there

shall be naught conditional in the pledge that I give to prove unto my brother and his friends that they have no need to be ashamed of Margaret! Oh, no!"—and her countenance glowed with animation, reflected from the feelings that filled her soul.

Sir Fleming was bewildered how to act: the excitement of his mind had been somewhat sobered down by the presence of the King; and he now began to reflect that there might really be something more in his sister's case than he could possibly conceive or conjecture. Besides, he loved her devotedly and fondly; and now he felt how sorry he should be if after all the violence of his proceedings, and all the strong expressions to which he had given utterance, she should be enabled to give a completely satisfactory explanation in the end. He hesitated—he looked at Margaret—he looked at the King—and he looked at the Earl of Bassentyne.

"Fleming!" said Roland, in a low whisper, "an idea has suddenly struck me! Your sister has assuredly wedded that young Englishman of whom you have spoken: but he is not Sir Louis Carlyon—that is a fictitious name which he bore—he is of higher rank, which fact circumstances will not for the moment suffer him to reveal—"

"But how know you all this?" demanded Fleming, gazing with astonishment upon his friend Roland.

"I do not know it," replied the latter: "how can I possibly know it? It is mere conjecture on my part! But rest assured that the conjecture is well founded: for it is the only possible means of accounting for all this mystery."

"Yes—it must be so!" ejaculated Fleming, after a few moments' reflection: but this colloquy was being carried on aside, at one extremity of the oratorio, while the King was now whispering to Margaret at the other. "Yes—it must be so!" repeated Fleming. "It is indeed the only way to account for all this mystery! Yes—I see it all! Sir Louis Carlyon must be other than he has represented himself! Ah, and therefore if this be so, Margaret told no falsehood when she said, in so strange a tone and with so peculiar a look that her husband was not Sir Louis Carlyon! Yes—and more too, my dear Roland! Who can tell but that the King himself has some knowledge or else some suspicion that the perfumed Englishman was something more than a Knight, and that there are reasons why the revelation of his real rank should for a day or two be delayed? Ah! if all this be so, how grieved—how afflicted shall I be at the injurious suspicions and outrages I have heaped upon poor Margaret!"

"Ah! and we shall all be grieved," rejoined the Earl of Bassentyne: "but the best atonement we can make is to arrive thus speedily at the most generous construction."

"And I now feel convinced," interjected Fleming, "it is a construction which will prove the right one."

"Yes—for did you not observe with what hauteur and impatience Margaret at times broke in, even while the King was speaking—"

"Roland, my dear friend, you have made me happy," said our hero, wringing the Earl of Bassentyne's hand. "I no longer entertain a doubt that your conjecture has alighted upon the exact truth—and all will thus be well!"

We must now follow Sir Casimir D'Este, who had left the oratory in compliance with the summons of the young retainer of the castle. When the door closed behind him, Sir Casimir again found himself in the apartment where he had seen the two beautiful girls and the lady who had crouched in the shade: but they were no longer there. As there were consequently no listeners in this room, the Teutonic Knight at once demanded,

"What would you with me? for what purpose did you summon me from the chapel?"

"I scarcely dared venture to come, Sir Knight," answered the youthful servitor: "but your squire so earnestly besought that I would lose not a moment—"

"Ah, Jassent!—is it he who desires speech of me?" ejaculated Sir Casimir. "Where is he?"

The young man led the way into the outer apartment; and there Jassent was waiting with an expression of countenance that denoted impatience and anxiety, singularly blended with solemnity.

"What is it, Jassent?" inquired the Teutonic Knight, so soon as the youthful servitor had quitted the apartment.

"A discovery of the most astonishing importance, my lord!" answered Jassent. "Oh, so marvellous—"

"And what may this be?" demanded Sir Casimir quickly.

"You recollect, my lord," resumed Jassent, "that when the evening before last we were entering the Glen of Roslin, we came upon a loathsome spectacle—a carrion-acorn suspended to an oak—"

"In good sooth, Jassent," interjected Sir Casimir, somewhat angrily, "I have other business in hand—"

"I know it, my lord—and I can conjecture it all, because the King himself is there!" exclaimed Jassent. "Were it a matter of trivial importance, I should not for a moment have thought of obtruding at such a crisis on my gracious lord's attention."

"Well, well, Jassent—proceed, proceed!" cried Sir Casimir, now becoming interested in his squire's discourse.

"Your lordship ordered me—"

"Drop the titles, Jassent," interjected Sir Casimir; "or you will be thus denominating me by inadvertence in the presence of others."

Jassent bowed with the profoundest respect to his master, and continued in the following manner:—

"You commanded me to return after dusk and drag the loathsome corpse into the Esk. I am however constrained to avow that I forgot your mandate until this morning. Then, as I was rambling in the glen, I suddenly recollected—"

"Well, my good Jassent," interrupted Sir Casimir, with a smile: "if it be to ask my pardon for having omitted until this morning something which I ordered to be done the evening before last—"

"Oh, no! it is not for this that I am speaking!" exclaimed Jassent. "In a word, be pleased to read these lines."

Thus speaking, Jassent produced a slip of parchment. The Teutonic Knight took the little document—bent his eyes upon it—started for a moment—and then read on to the end. Not a muscle of his countenance now moved, as in profound silence he folded up the slip and secured it about his person.

"Who knows of this, Jassent, besides yourself?" he at length inquired.

"Only young Seton, my lord—"

"And you found it, as I should conjecture from the preface with which you were treating me, upon the person—"

"Of Magnus Balveny, whose corpse is now food for fishes in the Esk," rejoined Jassent. "It was while dragging the body amidst the thicket down to the river's brink, I thought I might as well see if there were anything about his person—"

"And you found this precious document? Was there anything beside?"

"A purse well filled with coin," answered Jassent: "but *that*," he added with a certain degree of honest pride, "I suffered to remain about the ruffian's person."

"And why did you not show me this slip before?" asked Sir Casimir.

"Half-a-dozen words will give the explanation," replied Jassent deferentially. "Though well I speak the tongue of Scots and Southrons, yet am I utterly deficient in the clerly skill of reading such writing as that. On my return to the castle with the little slip in my possession, I was at once summoned to assist in buckling on your armour for the expedition which has brought us hither. Then all other thoughts were absorbed in the flight of that lady who—"

"Well, well," said Sir Casimir, "and what else?"

"It was only within the last few minutes that as I and Seton sat together over a stoup of ale in the servants' hall of this ancient Castle of Dalkaith, that finding ourselves alone I bethought myself of the document. I showed it to him—and he spelt to me its contents. I solemnly adjured him to breathe not a syllable thereof to a single soul until I had consulted your lordship—"

"You have done well, Jassent," exclaimed the Teutonic Knight. "And now speed back to your friend Seton, and tell him that on no account must he open his lips—no, not even to his own master Sir Fleming—unless permission shall be conveyed to him from me through the medium of yourself!"

Jassent bowed, and hastened from the apartment. Sir Casimir D'Este at once returned into the oratorio, his looks as collected and as severe as when he had issued thence some ten minutes back: indeed no one could tell that anything of importance had passed during the interval.

"It was my squire Jassent," he said, "who wished for some instructions. But how stands the matter here at present?"

"Sir Casimir, step aside with us for a moment," said Fleming Fitz-Allan, with an almost joyous expression of countenance. "His Majesty will permit us to converse apart for a few minutes?"

"Converse together as you think fit," exclaimed David, "in all privacy and confidence;"—and he then again turned towards Margaret.

"My dear friend," said Fleming, speaking in a rapid and more or less excited whisper to the Teutonic Knight, "we think we have found a clue to the reading of the whole mystery—"

"Ah! a clue?" said Sir Casimir.

"Yes—it was Roland who suggested it."

"And what may this clue be?" inquired Sir Casimir, wondering what could have transpired during his temporary absence from the oratorio.

"Yes," proceeded Fleming, "it is a conjecture which accounts for everything! Margaret is no doubt married—"

"Well," said the Knight, "I all along hoped so."

"And to the Englishman!" continued Fleming. "But then we have come to the conclusion that he is not Sir Louis Carlyon, that he is something higher—perhaps an Earl or a Marquis! At all events I really, my dear Sir Casimir, have no longer any fears—at least scarcely any—in respect to my sister's honour!"

"And what do you propose to do?" inquired Sir Casimir, after having reflected profoundly for a few moments.

"Let Margaret wait her own time! She asks but two days—"

"Well," exclaimed the King, breaking in at this juncture, "what decision have you arrived at?—what plan have you settled, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, now that you are assisted by the able counsel and sage judgment of your good friend Sir Casimir D'Este?"

"Sire," responded Sir Fleming, "I deem it right

—and herein my own opinion coincides with the judgment of my friends—that there should be due patience, and that my sister should be permitted the delay which she has demanded ere she make known the name of her husband.”

“And inasmuch,” added Sir Casimir D’Este, “as your Majesty has so generously performed the part of friend and arbitrator on the present occasion, it would only be right and proper that the whole mystery should be finally cleared up in the presence of your Grace. Therefore, as the lady has herself proposed it, let these proceedings be adjourned until we all meet again before the throne of your Majesty, the day after to-morrow at Dumbarton Castle, for the solemn hearing of the plaint of the Lady Elvira Ramsay against the traitorous Earl of Douglas.”

The King bent a searching glance upon Sir Casimir D’Este, to ascertain whether the Knight had any ulterior or sinister motives in supporting Margaret’s proposition that the present matter should have its termination in his own royal presence at Dumbarton Castle: but the looks of the Teutonic warrior were cold, severe, and imperturbable as was their usual aspect.

“Then be it as you say, Sir Knight,” exclaimed the King.

“Meanwhile, dear sister,” said Fleming, “you will return with us to Roslin?”

“No, brother,” she interrupted him, firmly yet without anger; “I set not foot again within the walls of Roslin until it shall have been proven that I am worthy to look my benefactor the Earl of Caithness in the face, and to embrace the pure-minded Albertina whom I love as a sister!”

“But where, then, will you sojourn for the present?” asked Fleming: “with whom will you repair to Dumbarton? Is it your wish that I and our friends—”

“Dispose of your own leisure and regulate your own proceedings,” answered Margaret, “according as ye think fit: but leave me in all freedom in respect to mine. I shall remain within the walls of this castle—for there are ladies at Dalkeith—you may have seen them as you burst through the adjoining room,” she added, with a slight tinge of sarcasm in her tone. “I now retire to join them.”

With these words Margaret inclined her head with graceful affability to the King: she then gave her hand to her brother Fleming, who pressed his lips to her cheek, hastily whispering, “Forgive me, beloved Margaret, if I have wronged you!”

“Yee—I forgive you, Fleming,” she responded, with a look of sisterly affection. “Sir Casimir,” she continued, turning towards the Teutonic Knight, “you throughout meant well to me—and we are friends as heretofore.”

“Heaven forbid that it should be otherwise Margaret!” responded the warrior, with more enthusiasm than he was wont to display.

“Farewell for the present, my lord,” she said to the Earl of Bassentyne; and then in a rapid whisper, she added, “Generous and magnanimous hast thou been throughout!”

Margaret then quitted the oratorio by the private door; while the King, Sir Casimir, Sir Fleming, and the Earl of Bassentyne took their departure by the principal entrance at the extremity facing the altar.

CHAPTER XL.

THE CONVERSATION IN THE COURT-YARD.

THE scenes which we have been describing in the two preceding chapters, were in some of their details fraught with an excitement and a passion which found loud and clamorous vent; but no sounds calculated to alarm the inmates of the castle, pierced beyond the massive walls and thick portals of the oratorio. Besides, as we have previously observed, there was only a limited number of domestics at Dalkeith,—no garrison—no sentinels parading in the corridors—no troops of pages with ears keenly intent to catch the slightest sound that might seem indicative of a summons. The monastic establishment belonging to the friars of Saint John was sufficiently remote from the building in which the chapel was situated, as to preclude the possibility of the turmoil reaching the holy fathers;—and thus the scenes which we have been narrating were limited as it were in their effects to the persons immediately concerned. As for the presence of the King at the fortalice, he was really in the habit of paying frequent visits to the royal burgh of Dalkeith,—which fact was so well known that the explanation he had given to the three warriors to account for his own sudden appearance there on this occasion, might well have been regarded by them as satisfactory,—always supposing that nothing had subsequently occurred in respect to either one of them to alter his notions on the point or serve as an elucidation for any portion of existing mysteries. But let us now resume the thread of our narrative.

The King and the three warriors, on issuing from the oratorio by the principal entrance, emerged upon a large landing communicating with the main entrance to the castle; this staircase they descended in silence; and they reached the court-yard. There the King, stopping short, said in an affable manner, “It much regrets me that I am unable to show such hospitalities and attentions as I would assuredly display were we at this moment in one of the royal palaces. But if ye will follow me to the adjacent monastery, the venerable superior will give ye meet welcome—not merely on my account, but likewise on your own.”

“We thank your Majesty,” answered Sir Casimir D’Este, speaking for himself and his companions; “but it behoves us to ride back with all suitable speed to Roslin Castle; for the Earl of Caithness and the Lady Albertina are enduring much affliction and uneasiness on account of the abrupt departure of one who is dear to them.”

“Doubtless it is so,” observed the King. “Return ye therefore—”

“One word, sire!” interjected the Earl of Bassentyne. “May I crave your Grace’s attention for a few moments? I have been subjected to a grievous and flagrant wrong—which was all the more reprehensible and atrocious, inasmuch as it was preceded by the pretext that I was to be employed in a secret but honourable mission on your Majesty’s behalf.”

“Indeed!” ejaculated David, with an air of the profoundest astonishment. “Who could have been the author—”

“Sire,” responded the young Earl, “the author of the transaction as mysterious as it was vile, and as unaccountable as it was treacherous, was none other than a servitor attached to your royal person.”

“What is this that I hear?” exclaimed the Monarch, with an air of indignation: “a servitor of mine dared deport himself treacherously towards one of our most faithful nobles—the bearer of one

of the most honourable titles throughout Caledonia! Name the catiff, my lord!—name him—and you have my royal word that his punishment shall be signal and rapid!”

“The name of the individual to whom I allude,” said the Earl of Bassentyne, “is Stephen Cochrane.”

“What! the senior of my pages—a person of trust and consequence?” exclaimed the King. “By St. Andrew of Scotland! this must be carefully looked into. Your lordship shall on a more fitting occasion give me a full account of the nature of the wrongs sustained at the hands of Stephen Cochrane. I will not lose sight of the matter! Besides, your lordship’s rank as a peer gives you at all times the right of access to our royal person; and therefore on some occasion when we shall have more leisure than circumstances now suffer us to enjoy, you, my lord, shall give me your narrative and I will punish the delinquent.”

The Earl of Bassentyne bowed in acknowledgment of the assurance just given by the King; and David reiterated the declaration that his gaily servitor should be most severely chastised. He then drew Sir Casimir D’Este aside, and asked in a low tone, “Have you received any tidings?—has any intelligence reached you within the last eight-and-forty hours—?”

“No, sire,” replied the Teutonic Knight: “but I am not uneasy at this delay. I feel convinced that within a very short time there will be on the Scottish shore a disembarkation of a sufficient number of brave Teutonic warriors to serve as an earnest of the good intentions of my Sovereign, his Highness Prince de Salza, in fulfilling the compact secretly ratified with your Majesty.”

“And thus,” said the King, “if in the course which I am about to take in reference to the Earl of Douglas, I should convert that nobleman into a deadly foe—?”

“It is most probable, sire,” interrupted Sir Casimir D’Este, in a dignified manner, “that your Grace will find yourself compelled, as the result of the approaching trial at Dumbarton, to strip the Earl of Douglas of all his titles and honours—to decree against him the severest pains and penalties that may be inflicted short of death—and to drive him as a miserable exile from the soil of Caledonia!”

“Aye, all this is good and well, Sir Knight,” said King David, “and perhaps no one would be better pleased than myself to see the Scottish soil disencumbered of the Black Douglas; for he, like all the rest of his race, is turbulent and unruly—ever plunging into turmoils of open violence or intrigues of dark machination—thus necessitating the intervention of the Monarch and compromising the royal dignity in a thousand ways. For if the King side with the Douglas, then does he of a verity offend the hundreds of noble families who are the enemies of the Douglas; while if on the other hand he assume an attitude decidedly hostile to the Douglas, then does he incur the risk of exciting the hatreds, the seditions, and the treasons of the powerful races which are akin to the Douglas. Do you understand all this, Sir Casimir D’Este?—and do you comprehend that it was under the influence of these considerations I selected my fortress of Dumbarton as the spot where I shall hold my court on the occasion when the powerful Earl of Douglas is cited to appear before me? Once within those walls,” added the King, fixing a significant regard upon Sir Casimir D’Este, “the Douglas is virtually my prisoner!”

“No doubt, sire,” answered the Teutonic Knight. “What, then, has your Majesty to apprehend as the consequence of dealing out the strictest justice

against the false Earl of Douglas?—always supposing and taking it for granted that the plaint of the Lady Elvira Ramsay shall justify in its details the sketch already outlined to your Grace.”

“There will be many powerful peers and nobles gathered at Dumbarton on the day following to-morrow,” continued the King; “and they will be attended by hosts of adherents. The Black Earl has assuredly suffered in fame and repute in consequence of recent events: but still, for reasons of kinship, and in pursuance of traditional friendship, several of our loftiest Scottish paladins might be inspired to adopt the cause of the Douglas. Now, although my fortress of Dumbarton affords special facilities for the taking of all due precautions—and it was for this very reason that I selected that castle for the coming occasion—yet I hesitate not to confess, Sir Casimir, that I feel I am playing a game more or less hazardous. I am incurring risks—In short,” added the Monarch, his brow becoming suddenly clouded, as if a weight of care had fallen upon it, “civil wars have sprung up, and the deadliest strifes have been engendered between the Monarch and his nobles, for causes less significant than the matter which we have in hand! A single false step on my part—?”

“Your Majesty,” interjected the Teutonic Knight, “must be careful not to make a false step.”

“But even if I exercise all my caution,” resumed the King, “what if some spark should be stricken from a spot unforeseen or unsuspected, and throw everything into a conflagration?”

“There must be the means of annihilating the spark the very moment it is seen to scintillate. Thus!” added the Teutonic Knight; and he stamped his steel-clad foot upon the pavement of the courtyard.

“Ah! now,” said the King, “we are drawing towards the very point to which it was my purpose to lead you. If you, Sir Knight, had but an armed troop at your back, I have more confidence in your mighty prowess than in the good intentions of all the forces which may attend me as an escort.”

Sir Casimir D’Este bowed slightly in acknowledgment of that compliment; and he said, “Your Grace will doubtless repair well attended to Dumbarton?”

“There will be three hundred persons in my cavalcade,” responded the King.

“Both the Earls of Caithness and Bassentyne will be attended by their followers,” observed Sir Casimir: “the Lady Elvira Ramsay travels under the protection of a hundred of Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan’s own feudal retainers from the domain of Hermitage;—and every peer whose heart is devoted to your Highness, will attend with a becoming suite. Finally, there is the garrison of Dumbarton itself, upon which your Majesty doubtless knows full well that you can calculate—or else would your Grace have hesitated to choose that fortress at all for the occasion.”

“Of a surety, Sir Knight,” responded the King, “there will be gathered at Dumbarton, the day after to-morrow, a goodly assemblage of warriors ready to draw a sword for their Monarch in any cause which he may choose to proclaim his own. But, on the other hand, there will be many almost equally willing to plunge into deadly feud or raise the banner of civil war with the name of the Black Douglas as a watchword. For mark you, Sir Knight! this will prove a very different affair from that of the lists at Roslin. Then there had been but a notice of three days; and few, if any, of the great families who might espouse the Douglas cause, had time to be present on that occasion. But now, for an entire month the notice has been before the Scottish public;

and there will be a strong muster of friends as well as foes to hear the trial and behold its result."

"In a word, therefore," said Sir Casimir, "your Highness apprehends the possibility of a collision the day after to-morrow, betwixt the partisans of the Douglas and those who are devoted to the person of your Grace?"

"A collision is possible," answered David; "and it is assuredly to be dreaded for more reasons than one. In the first place, it is not always easy to calculate the result: but even granting that such result should be favourable to our side, yet what animosities and rancours are left behind! what smouldering flames to burst forth hereafter!"

"Not when the monarch plays a bold and decisive part," interjected Sir Casimir D'Este; "and having pronounced a righteous sentence against a delinquent noble, proves that he has the power to vindicate the justice of which he is the executive, and to strike terror into the hearts of all who may rebelliously question the law's decree or seek to frustrate it. Have you not a man, sire, on whom you can reckon for such an emergency?—a man who by the influence of his own resolute character and well-known sternness of purpose——"

"In all Scotland there is at this moment," interrupted the King, "but one man who can thus aid me; and that man is he to whom I am speaking. Did I not ere now say that I would sooner trust to your prowess——"

"'Tis done, sire!" interrupted Sir Casimir: "you shall trust to it—and it shall serve your purpose! If it were needful, I would swear upon my cross-handled sword that your person shall be safe even in the midst of your most rebellious peers—and that not only shall your judgment, whatsoever it may be, ensure respect and be received with submission, but your dignity as a monarch shall be enhanced. In all this, sire, I am alluding only to the matter which touches and concerns the plaint of the Lady Elvira Ramsay against the Earl of Douglas: for I know not what other matters may arise to claim your Grace's attention at Dumbarton Castle the day after to-morrow."

"Ah! let me be well quit of the affair which concerns the Black Douglas," exclaimed the King,—"and everything else will doubtless go smoothly enough!" he added in a musing tone to himself.

"Thus," resumed Sir Casimir, affecting not to perceive that there was anything at all abstracted for a moment in the King's manner,—"thus, if your Grace be disposed to accept my services on the occasion——"

"Willingly! Indeed I was already seeking them by the very tenour of my discourse. But how do you propose to act? what part will you take in the ceremony? in what character will you appear? This, Sir Knight, seems to me," proceeded the King, "to constitute the great difficulty."

"I see no difficulty, sire," interrupted Sir Casimir. "If your Majesty will be kind enough to place implicit confidence in my good faith—my ability—my discretion——"

"'Tis already done!" exclaimed the King. "Have you any demand to make? is there any condition you may desire that I should fulfil?"

"My requirements may be speedily summed up," responded Sir Casimir, after having reflected for a few moments. "It may suit me to demand of your Grace's secretaries and ministerial functionaries, certain powers, facilities, licenses, and liberties, in the making of such dispositions as I may deem necessary in the carrying out of my plans for ensuring the safety of your royal person. Moreover, there must be due written authority under your own sign-manual for the landing of the gallant troops whom

my Sovereign, Prince de Salza, has agreed to send to the Scottish shore. Likewise I shall need a paper duly signed, but otherwise left in blank,—that I may in any moment of emergency fill up the same in terms of suitable mandate to the Governor of Dumbarton——"

"Such paper," interrupted the King, "will only be used with the utmost discretion and circumspection?"

"On my word as a Knight, and on my soul as a Christian," exclaimed Sir Casimir, "I will not render that paper subservient to any evil purpose. Besides, sire," he added, drawing himself up with dignity, "if you cannot trust me——"

"Be not offended, Sir Casimir," cried the King: "I know that I can trust you—and you shall see that I place the most implicit reliance on your honour! Indeed, how could it be otherwise? Are you not the envoy and representative of the high and mighty Sovereign Prince de Salza, the warrior-king of the most honourable Order in Christendom? Yes!—and your testimonials from your royal master were of an unexceptionable character. Moreover, the letters which you showed me at Roslin Castle, and which your illustrious Prince has condescended to write to you, all prove that you, Sir Knight, are the very soul of honour and that the name of Sir Casimir D'Este must be deemed synonymous with integrity, rectitude, and magnanimity. As for your prowess—of that, Sir Knight, all Scotland has rung. And lastly, the very reasons which have brought you into my kingdom—namely, to lay the basis of arrangements for the speedy invasion of England—prove your devotion to my person."

David, naturally suspicious, was in reality summing up all these reasons to satisfy himself that he should be justified in placing the fullest confidence in Sir Casimir D'Este; while the speech might really have been taken for the unaffected and spontaneous effusion of compliments paid to the warrior. Doubtless the Teutonic Knight—who was as keen as the King himself, but with a far loftier and more manly shrewdness—comprehended tolerably well what was passing in his Majesty's mind: but it suited his purpose to dissemble somewhat, and to have the appearance of feeling alike flattered and honoured by David's confidence.

"And thus," proceeded the Monarch, "I entrust everything to your skill, sagacity, and judgment on the important occasion now approaching. Without appearing to have any ostensible character, you will in reality be vested with plenary powers, which at any moment you may exercise. If no emergency should arise, the world may remain in ignorance that such precautions were taken: but if, on the other hand, the necessity should transpire,—then will you all in a moment find yourself endowed with the authority of a generalissimo. You will produce my decree—you will read it—the troops of my own cavalcade will obey you—every peer and baron, lord and knight, who may be devoted to the cause of their Sovereign, will gladly place themselves under the orders of so famed a warrior as Sir Casimir D'Este!"

"All this, sire, is as I understood and meant it," responded the Teutonic Knight. "And now, as time presses, and I have certain dispositions to make——"

"You require the requisite documents and authorities," answered the King.

Thus speaking, the Monarch drew forth his tablets, in which were several leaves of parchment; and on one of these leaves he wrote a brief instruction to the Secretary of the Royal Council, enjoining that functionary to fulfil certain requirements (which were specified) on behalf of Sir Casimir



D'Este. This being done, the Monarch urged the Teutonic Knight's prompt departure for Edinburgh,—adding, “You will yet have time this evening to obtain the authorities and licenses particularized in that list; and thus not an hour will unnecessarily be lost. In respect to my own signatures to any special deeds, or to a blank paper to be subsequently filled up, they shall be forwarded under seal to the hostelry of the Golden Falcon before the sunrise of to-morrow. And now, Sir Knight, that I believe all our conditions are understood and all our arrangements effected, I will bid you farewell: for I am famishing for such refreshment as the holy fathers in the adjoining monastery may have ordered to be served up.”

While this colloquy was taking place between King David and Sir Casimir D'Este, the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan had been to seek out Jassent and Seton, in order that the horses might be led forth from the stable to which they had been consigned. On returning into the court-yard, Roland and the young Knight remained at a respectful distance, while the King and Sir Casimir were standing apart, evidently engaged in earnest conversation. At length they beheld his Majesty's squire towards the gateway; and then they rejoined Sir Casimir.

“Return you quick, my dear Fleming,” said the Teutonic Knight, “to Roslin—and bear such tidings in reference to your sister Margaret as will relieve the worthy Earl of Caithness and the charming Lady Albertina of the suspense they are now suffering. Do not speak despondingly, Fleming—but rather hopefully—respecting your sister's case: for in good sooth there is no doubt everything to hope—as you yourself just now declared to me before we quitted the chapel. For my part, I am bound for Edinburgh. Business takes me thither. But we shall meet again at Dumbarton. Whither go you, my lord?” inquired Sir Casimir, turning to the Earl of Bassentyne.

“I go hence to my own castle,” he replied, “that I may make suitable arrangements for appearing likewise at Dumbarton.”

“Then we three disperse in different directions,” said Sir Casimir D'Este.

The horses were already in waiting: they were quickly mounted; and while Sir Casimir D'Este, followed by Jassent, rode rapidly away in the direction of the metropolis—Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, attended by young Seton, sped towards Roslin—and the Earl of Bassentyne wended his way to his own castle.

Not more than a mile from Dalkeith had the Teutonic Knight and his squire ridden, when the warrior, suddenly reining in his steed, exclaimed, “Jassent—my faithful Jassent! there is a task which you might possibly accomplish, and which, if achieved, would be fraught with infinite utility to certain projects which I have in hand!”

“You know, my lord,” responded the squire, with an air of the profoundest respect, “that my life, if needful, shall be devoted to your service; and surely, therefore, no task can be too dangerous nor difficult for me to undertake?”

“Well and bravely spoken!” cried Sir Casimir. “I know that you will do your best. This, then, is the task:—Go seek for the writer of the parchment which you are now placed in my hand! Go seek for him wheresoever you think that he may be found!—and if amidst the chapters of chances and accidents it should prove that you are successful, then, my faithful Jassent, cajole him by bribes or compel him by threats to accompany you to Dumbarton!”

The squire promised to follow all the instructions

which he thus received; and he accordingly separated from his master, who rode rapidly onward in the direction of Edinburgh.

But we must now return to Dalkeith; for it is our purpose to rivet the attention of the reader for the present upon the proceedings of the King. His Majesty had arrived at the adjacent monastery with but a limited number of retainers,—thus travelling (as it was often his wont) under a species of *incognito*. On parting from the Teutonic Knight, the Earl of Bassentyne, and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, David had pretended to be retracing his way towards the monastery: but instead of entering into that holy pile, he passed through a court-yard, and by means of a private door regained admission into the castle itself. He now proceeded to a suite of apartments in the immediate vicinage of those through which the three warriors had burst in their way to the chapel; and in an outer room he found the two young damsels to whom we have before alluded. They were seated together, talking over in subdued voices the events which had just occurred; but immediately upon the King's appearance, they rose and assumed the most respectful demeanour, their looks being modestly bent downward as the Monarch passed towards the adjoining apartment. In this inner apartment two ladies were seated: one was Margaret—the other was the same to whom we have before alluded as being in the companionship of the young damsels in the chamber through which the warriors had burst. In respect to this lady, we need not on the present occasion say more than that she was remarkably handsome—that her age was about thirty—and that she was dressed with a degree of richness which seemed to indicate no mean rank, while the fashion of the costume set off the symmetry of her shape to the fullest advantage of its faultless proportions.

On entering the apartment where Margaret and this lady were seated together, the King at once put on a friendly familiarity, which was however glossed over with a courtly polish; and taking Margaret's hand, he said, “My beloved, it grieves me much that you should have been ere now subjected to such trouble and vexation! And to your ladyship likewise,” continued the Monarch, turning towards Margaret's companion, “should my regrets be expressed, that while so generously and kindly engaged in our service, and ministering to our well-beloved Margaret, your ears should be assailed by the din of armed men breaking down massive doorways as if they were but pieces of parchment!”

“Your Grace is most kind,” responded the lady, “to think it worth while thus to make excuses; but they may indeed be spared—for now that all the *fracas* has ceased, the warriors have withdrawn, and everything tends towards an amicable settlement, I reek but little for the momentary terror which I ere now experienced. Besides, even that was scarcely a terror on my own account—and so soon as I received the assurance that my beloved and respected Queen had passed safely through the ordeal, my heart felt as light as ever.”

“And the two damsels,” said the King,—“were they not overcome by terror? or have they been in a manner prepared by recent circumstances for ventures and incidents which otherwise would little befit the gentle nature of their sex? Say—how was it, Countess?”

“In good sooth, sire,” replied the lady, “my faithful little fairies Maude and Minnie were sadly scared; but now methinks they make light of the occurrence, and can even afford to smile at a danger which is past. But discretion suggests that I should withdraw: for doubtless your Highnesses would fain hold private discourse together.”

The Countess—for such appeared to be her rank—withdrew from the apartment; and as the door closed behind her, the King threw his arms about Margaret's neck, exclaiming, "Oh, my beloved! how afflicted was I on your account that this misadventure should have taken place!"

"Alas, sire," responded Margaret, "it is no wonder that perplexities and embarrassments, troubles and annoyances, arise out of the tortuous path that we have been pursuing. Oh! conceive what my feelings must have been when my own brother stood before me, adjuring me to proclaim if I were a wedded wife—and I not daring to name my husband!"

"Soothe yourself, dearest Margaret! tranquillize your feelings!" said the King, lavishing caresses upon her; "and all will yet be well! But know you how your brother and his companions obtained the knowledge that you had come to Dalkeith? Was aught said to throw a light upon that subject ere I burst into the chapel?"

"Nothing was said to elucidate the point," responded Margaret.

"Neither did they seem," continued the King, "to entertain the slightest suspicion in reference to the Countess of Morton?"

"Not the slightest," answered Margaret. "Oh, sire! what an ordeal through which to drag me! How much am I suffering on account of this fond devoted love of mine—"

"And am I not suffering likewise, Margaret?" asked the King, in a gentle voice of reproach. "Oh! do not think that all the annoyance and vexation are on your side only!"

"To speak soothly, sire," interjected Margaret, "I scarcely know what to think! All the events of the last forty-eight hours appear to be a dream, since the moment when the Countess revealed herself to me!"

"And why should you be thus bewildered, my dear Margaret?" inquired the King, as with one arm thrown around her waist, he gazed tenderly upon her marvellously handsome countenance.

"Oh, why am I bewildered?" she cried, in a tone that was half petulant. "Because I have a thousand questions to ask, and I know not where to begin, nor how to ask them! Yet will I make an endeavour. Tell me then, in the first place, my dear husband, wherefore was the Countess of Morton bidden to come all the way from England to play so strange a part?"

"Was it not necessary," asked the King, "that you should have faithfully devoted female friends, ready to serve you in any emergency? Had I not foreseen that the moment must come when you would quit Roslin Castle—for you yourself were impatient of a sojourn there in what you termed a false position—"

"Doubtless, sire—and natural enough!" exclaimed Margaret. "You had designed to make me your wife—and in making me your wife, you had elevated me to the rank of a Queen! Every sense of feminine propriety and modesty rendered me anxious to be publicly acknowledged as the former; while perhaps a certain pride—a feeling of laudable ambition—caused my heart to yearn for the coming of the moment when I should be proclaimed as the latter."

"And being aware of this," resumed the King, "I took my measures accordingly. Not to Albertina Roslin could you confide your secret—for she, as a dutious daughter, would have held herself bound to whisper the tale in her father's ear: and you yourself, sweet Margaret, assured me that of all the handmaidens within the walls of that castle, there

was not one of whom you could venture to make a confidante."

"True, my beloved lord," answered Margaret: "for even on our bridal night there was not one of my own sex to attend upon me at the altar!"

A strange smile—a smile which had something sinister in it, something of ribald and libertine mockery—wavered for a moment upon David's lips, as Margaret thus spoke of the wedding ceremony. But her head was pillowed on his shoulder at the instant—her eyes were bent downward—and consequently she did not perceive that expression which flitted over the Monarch's countenance.

"You see, therefore, my beloved one," he continued, "you had not a female friend in the whole world in whom you could confide!—not a soul of your own sex to succour you in any emergency or to be your companion in any crisis! I therefore resolved to supply this want—and I gave you the Countess of Morton as a friend and confidante."

"You knew her well, then, sire?" asked Margaret, her eyes now resting for a moment with jealous uneasiness upon the Monarch's face.

"Not particularly well," he responded, with a careless air, but which was nevertheless that of perfect self-possession; "and I think, dear Margaret, I told you this same thing the evening before last at Roslin. But her husband has long been a staunch friend of mine; and it was just before I left England, seven years ago, to resume my seat upon the Scottish throne, that I was a witness at the nuptials of the Earl of Morton and your present friend Louisa. I had previously known her slightly," added David: "but through the medium of the correspondence which I have from time to time maintained with my friend the Earl of Morton, I have since learnt much in respect to the character of his wife."

"Methought," observed Margaret, "that public rumour spoke somewhat lightly and disparagingly of the Countess of Morton? Nay, more—the idea has even been running in my head that I had heard it whispered—methinks it was even by the Earl of Caithness himself—that his kinsman the Lord of Morton had somewhat tarnished a noble name by a derogatory alliance?"

"There can be no doubt that the Countess of Morton," replied David, "was an English lady of far inferior rank to the position of the great Scottish Earl: but still she came of no dishonourable stock—she was bred in all becoming tenderness and gentility—and I leave you to judge whether she be not as fascinating in her manners and as lively in her disposition as she is well favoured in her person?"

"Assuredly she is a most agreeable companion," observed Margaret. "But wherefore so combine your plans that she should come in disguise to Roslin?"

"Because no reason nor pretext could have been devised or invented for the Countess of Morton to pay a visit to Roslin, unknown to the Earl of Caithness as she was, and unacknowledged by him as his kinsman's wife. Therefore came she in disguise, attended by her two favourite damsels;—and I ask you, Margaret," added the King, with a gay laugh, "whether those disguises must not have been excellent that for a whole fortnight they succeeded in blinding the eyes of all beholders—or rather I should say in defying detection?"

"True," observed Margaret: "the disguises were admirable! But confess, sire, that it was a strange and tortuous method of introducing the Countess of Morton unto me?"

"It was the only method," answered the King. "The time came when you chose to fly from Roslin;

And how could you have fled without female confidantes and companions?"

"True!" said Margaret: "I could not have fled alone—or else reports of the direst evil would have been spread relative to one who, as Scotland's Queen, was bound to keep her fame immaculate. But tell me, sire—why for twelve whole days did you suffer me to remain in ignorance of the presence of the Countess of Morton at Roslin Castle?—why leave me as well as the rest to suppose that Sir Louis Carlyon was really what he represented himself to be?"

"All this was for precaution's sake, my beloved," rejoined the King. "If you had been told from the outset that the English Knight whose chivalry had something so elegant and even exquisitely fastidious about it, was a handsome woman in disguise, there would have been significant interchanges of glances betwixt you—perhaps in a moment of inadvertence you might have thrown your arms around her neck, or laid your hand familiarly upon her shoulder—In short, dearest Margaret, I deemed it more prudent that the secret should be maintained until almost the last instant. And it was so. I think," added the King with a smile, "the Countess teased you a little, and playfully tormented you; for she has a gay and sprightly disposition—a trifle roguish and mischievous withal—"

"Yes—she affected to make love to me," said Margaret, who could not help laughing as she looked back upon the scene with the fictitious Sir Louis Carlyon in the glen. "But even while she was giving vent to her absurdities, and playing her jests upon me with so much serio-comic impressiveness, the suspicion darted once or twice through my mind that the seeming Sir Louis Carlyon might possibly be one of my own sex in disguise. Yet I repelled the idea—"

"And what said she at last?" inquired the King: "how broke she the secret to your ear?"

"You know, sire," Margaret answered, "that you had given me to understand in strictest privacy that you had taken measures to secure me the services of the Countess of Morton as my principal lady of the bedchamber, against such time when my acknowledgment as your royal wife and as Scotland's Queen should take place—but little suspected I that Louisa of Morton was already my companion and my friend in the person of Sir Louis Carlyon! Thus you may conceive my surprise as well as my joy, sire, when the seeming English Knight, at length choosing to put an end to his mischievous pleasantries, whispered in my ear, '*I am Louisa Countess of Morton!*'"

"And then," said the King, laughing, "you embraced her with sisterly effusion?—and behold! the Earl of Caithness was standing at a little distance, a spectator of the scene?"

"Yes—and then I fled from the spot, leaving the seeming Sir Louis Carlyon to satisfy the mind of my noble benefactor. This he did with a marvellous tact: and in the meanwhile as I was speeding through the glen, I beheld the Knight's two young pages—William and Robert as he called them—"

"But Maude and Minnie, as they turned out to be," added David, again laughing merrily.

"Yes. Then," continued Margaret, "I was no longer in any doubt in respect to the sex of the two damsels who though in reality nineteen years of age, yet when appared in their pages' costume, seemed to be mere boys of fourteen or fifteen. But to revert, sire, to a former topic," she went on to say, in a more serious tone and with a corresponding change of look, "permit me once more to observe that it seems to have been a tortuous and even clumsy project to bring the Countess disguised in the first in-

stance to Roslin, and then to persuade me to flee away with her, so that I was sure of risking my fair fame, and even inviting the very accusation which was ere now levelled against me in the chapel, to the effect that I had eloped with Sir Louis Carlyon!"

"Why harp incessantly, my beloved, upon this string?" demanded David, gently pressing her fine form to his breast. "Listen—and I will explain myself so lucidly and yet so succinctly that my course of action shall be made intelligible in a manner that will render all future comment absolutely unnecessary. In the first place it was needful to provide you with a female friend sufficiently trustworthy to become acquainted with your secret, and of sufficiently high rank to be your suitable companion. That friend was found in the Countess of Morton. She could not, for propriety's sake, travel with male attendants *only*: she therefore journeyed with her damosels disguised as pages. She could not visit Roslin openly, proclaiming herself to be the Countess of Morton—because she was uninvited—because she had no pretext for going thither—and because such a proceeding would have at once struck Lord Caithness as being suspiciously strange. Therefore it was under the guise and name of Sir Louis Carlyon that the Countess sought the halls of Roslin. Up to this point all is comprehensible enough—is it not so?" asked the King.

Margaret made an affirmative sign; and the Monarch went on speaking.

"Then, my beloved, came the moment when I found myself obliged to terminate my sojourn within those walls; and you insisted that some decisive step should be taken on your behalf—for you declared that no longer could you live in that false position there. The course to be pursued was already foreseen, and therefore open. I enjoined you to accompany your friend the Countess to her own Castle of Dalkeith—and you are here."

"All this is plain narrative, sire," said Margaret; somewhat hastily: "but it was a reason—a motive that I desired—"

"The reason is plain—the motive is evident," answered the King. "You could not flee away alone and unattended—this you yourself have already more than once admitted—you therefore were enjoined to fly with a female companion whom you had already found."

"Yes—but disguised," said Margaret, "in a way to render my flight suspicious and equivocal."

"Only for a few days!" interrupted the King: "and then, when everything shall be explained and all disguises thrown off—when Sir Louis Carlyon stands before the world as Louisa of Morton, and the pages William and Robert blushing answer to the softer and prettier names of Maude and Minnie—"

"Yes—Oh! then, sire," said the lady, in a low voice which was full of emotion, "everything will be revealed—and it will be made manifest that Margaret, instead of fleeing dishonourably or equivocally with an English Knight, was accompanying the female friend whom her royal husband had found for her! Shall it not be so?" asked Margaret, in a soft caressing tone.

"Everything shall be as you wish, my beloved," he responded. "But now, as time draws on—and I am to banquet with yourself and the Countess this evening—I will leave you for a short space, and seek the apartments which the holy fathers allot me in the monastery, so that I may make some fitting and suitable change in my toilet."

King David embraced Margaret: for upwards of a minute he held her fine form pressed against his

heart—and he looked down with impassioned rapture into the luminous depths of her black eyes. She smiled at him with a glow of pride upon her countenance, as she said within herself, "It is the King of Scotland—one of the mighty Monarchs of Christendom—whom I thus claim as my husband!"

On issuing from the room where this scene had taken place with Margaret, the King did not immediately repair to the adjoining monastery: but he sought the Countess of Morton in the apartment to which she had ere now retired.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE COUNTESS OF MORTON.

LOUISA Countess of Morton has been already to a certain extent described to our readers. Though only of the medium stature when seeming to be of the male sex—for we particularised her height to be about five feet eight inches—yet for a woman she was tall; while the mingled elegance and dignity of her gait, with a certain statuesque carriage of her head, seemed to add two or three inches to her stature. Her shoulders were broad; her chest was ample—while the feminine contours of the bust were well-formed, but by no means richly developed. She had what is called a long waist,—not of that thinness which the two hands might span, but of a symmetry consistent with the configuration displayed in a Grecian statue. Her lower limbs were perfectly straight, and were somewhat robustly modelled, though delicately turned at the ankles, and terminating in a foot which was long, shapely, and with a nobly arched instep. Her tread was elastic and firm: she moved with perfect freedom, but yet with elegance and grace; for in her girlhood she had been fond of all the gymnastic exercises that were practised by her sex. She was a perfect horsewoman, and had not the slightest fear when seated on the back of even the most spirited animal. Her hands were somewhat large, though well formed—but yet too large to satisfy the strict hypercritical notions of justness of proportions in respect to female symmetry. She habitually wore her dark brown hair somewhat short for a woman; though on the other hand it was somewhat long for a man. Her teeth—white as ivory, and faultlessly preserved, without speck or blemish, strongly set in the red tenacious gums—were also too large to be perfectly consistent with the rigid notions of female loveliness; and her features, which seemed only partially prominent in their aquiline profile for a man, were largely chiselled for a woman. Nevertheless, it was a strikingly handsome profile, bespeaking strong passions when considered in reference to her real sex.

Being accustomed to out-door exercises—hawking and hunting—and never so happy as when on horseback, Louisa's countenance was much embrowned for a lady of rank; while the hues of her cheeks bespoke a buxom vigorous health. Her voice was strong and flutelike in the rich harmony of its full tones—perhaps even too masculine for one of her sex; while the habit of speaking loudly to hawk and hound, and of encouraging her steed in exhilarating accents when engaged in the ardour of the chase, gave a certain manliness to its intonation. Thus, if the reader follows well this description, and compares it with that which we gave when describing the lady as Sir Louis Carlyon, he will at once perceive how easy it was to pass herself off as one of the sterner sex. And then too,

with an admirable art she had availed herself of what may be termed the unconquerable or natural softnesses of her proper sex to give them the air of a certain effeminacy pertaining to the other sex which she had assumed. She had affected a dandyism in her male costume: she had used fragrant essences; and thus by the mingling of the seeming attributes of the man with the milder traits of the woman, she had succeeded most admirably in personating a perfumed Knight fresh from the somewhat emasculating atmosphere of the gilded saloons of the British Court.

But on these points we have still somewhat more to say. By the aid of a dye most artistically applied by a hard bristly brush, which imprinted the pigment in pyriads of little dots rather than in one uninterrupted surface of bluish shade upon the skin, she had so tinted the lower part of her countenance, when wearing male apparel, as to give the appearance of a beard shaven off into perfect smoothness. Her costume had been chosen with a view to its complete adaptation to the masculine character which for the nonce she had played. It fitted her form with a sufficient tightness to impart a manly air to its symmetry, and yet with that degree of looseness which concealed the feminine contours.

She possessed a strong mind and a perfect self-possession, added to a wondrous readiness of wit, a rollicking buoyancy of spirits, and a dashing off-hand manner which passed for a chivalrous dauntlessness. Thus, the further this description is continued, the more completely must it prove to the reader the ease, the facility, and the art of self-adaptation with which the Countess of Morton performed the part which she had undertaken. She was high-spirited and fearless—seldom to be taken off her guard—with a certain hardihood in her looks, and capable of sustaining the gaze of any eyes that might be riveted upon her. With all these attributes, it is no wonder if she had entered heart and soul into the adventure which was proposed to her, or that she should have for nearly a fortnight sustained her part so well as to defy the most scrutinizing looks, or repel suspicion, even it such were at any moment formed with regard to her.

There was in her disposition a sly vein of humour—an innocent mischievousness—a fondness for light jesting and rillery, which notwithstanding never wounded the feelings of others, but always stopped short at the point at which offence might be given. She was naturally good-natured, and yet thoroughly heartless—if the reader can understand what we mean, and will not deem us paradoxical. In other words, she was frank, jovial, and affable, in her general demeanour and conversation; and she would render a service when it militated not against her own interests. But in other respects she was thoroughly selfish and worldly-minded. Show her how she might benefit herself by means of machination, plot, or intrigue—and she would unhesitatingly sacrifice every other consideration. Sterling virtue she had none; true rectitude of principle had long been lost sight of. There were in her soul the elements calculated to render her capable of any crime; and though she never uselessly pursued the path of wickedness, or performed a bad deed unless some positive benefit were to be obtained, she was nevertheless one of those beings that would trample remorselessly upon every law human and divine, if a commensurate object were to be attained.

Her age was in reality about thirty—perhaps a little more; so that when in her male attire, and when seen close, she might well pass for a young man of five-and-twenty; and when viewed at a

distance, would appear much younger still, even to be thought at the first glance a mere stripling of eighteen.

But now let us consider the Countess of Morton more minutely in reference to her real sex, and while she is elegantly apparelled, as we find her on the occasion of which we are now speaking. There was an unmistakable sensuousness in the expression of her countenance as well as in its configuration: the eyes, the lips, and the chin—the whole profile indeed—indicated strong passions. The mouth had that half-smiling air which with one of the opposite sex is indicative of joyousness, but with the softer sex is often the reflection or the outward play of an innate voluptuousness, giving encouragement and ready to expand into a more amorously significant overture. The large full blue eyes, of deepest blue, seemed to swim in a luminous fluid, which was nevertheless full of a melting languor; while in their almost purple hue, and with their softly sensuous expression, they seemed to say, "Do not forget me," like the forget-me-not of which they had borrowed the colour.

We have now said enough to enable the reader to form something more than a bare idea of the Countess of Morton; but whatsoever remains in the background in respect to her true character and her past history, we must leave for development in future chapters of our narrative. When in the presence of Margaret and the King together, the gay familiarity of her manner had been attamped by an air of respect towards the Monarch: but now, when she was alone with him in the apartment where he sought her, there was far more freedom in her manner—restraint seemed to be thrown off—and they appeared to meet on terms that must have had their warrant in a close intimacy or thorough understanding belonging to a date long anterior to the opening of our tale. She was half reclining upon a long settee, or species of ottoman, when the King entered: she did not rise to her feet to receive the Monarch—but she simply raised herself to a sitting posture, and made a sign for him to sit down by her side.

"And how fares it with your charmer?" she inquired, with an arch smile upon her lips.

"Some of my best calculations have been put out or disjoined by the course of events," answered the King, with a certain air of vexation.

"Perhaps the moment is now come," said Louisa, "when your Grace will be pleased to let me a little more into the secrets of your royal mind than I have hitherto been initiated? Methinks you are somewhat too wary—too suspicious and mistrustful—"

"Not so, Louisa," answered the King. "As a matter of course, I purposed to tell you everything: but so rarely had we an opportunity for private speech when at Roslin—and the letter which I wrote summoning you from England, was necessarily worded with all due caution and reserve, considering the danger of miscarriage—"

"At the very outset, my royal friend," said the Countess of Morton, "there is a question which I will ask—and which indeed was at the tip of my tongue a dozen times while we were together at Roslin—but which with a diffidence and a bashfulness most marvellously unusual with me, I on each occasion hesitated to put."

"And what question may this be?" inquired the King.

"I ask rather that I may know fully how henceforth I am to act," rejoined the Countess, "than through mere idle curiosity—"

"Speak!—in St. Andrew's name, speak!" said

the King: "what is your question? Put it fearlessly."

"I would simply inquire," continued Louisa, "whether your Highness be really bound to the handsome Margaret by bonds so firm that naught but a Papal decree from Rome can dissolve them; or whether—"

"By all the Saints!" ejaculated the King, with a derisive smile, "you affect a vast degree of innocence, my dear Louisa!"

"How should I know the truth?" she demanded.

"Your Grace's letter spoke of a beautiful mistress whose ambition you had to curb—whose wayward temper you had to coerce,—whom, in short, you had to delude and dupe, console and pacify, and heaven knows what!—and for all which purposes you needed my ingenuity and succour."

"And are not the facts as I thus presented them to you?" demanded the King.

"How can I think so," exclaimed Louisa, "when the beauteous black-eyed houri speaks confidently to me of a marriage-ceremony performed in secrecy at Roslin Castle, almost at the dead of night—of a priest in canonicals—of a certificate duly drawn up and signed by two witnesses—which certificate the priest himself solemnly undertook to lodge amongst the archives of the Royal Chancery at such time when the marriage should be duly proclaimed—"

Here a loud scornful laugh burst from David's lips; and he exclaimed, "Of a surety, my dear Louisa! you must conceive that my wits have gone a wool-gathering, and that I have profited naught by the stern teachings of my previous life's calamities. Listen, while I answer you categorically and succinctly. The marriage was a delusion and a sham—my astute follower Stephen Cochrane, whom you remember in England during the latter years of my captivity, arranged it all—the seeming priest was some creature whom he dressed up for the occasion—the certificate was a piece of waste parchment, which that seeming priest doubtless tore up at the first convenient opportunity—Stephen Cochrane himself was one of the witnesses—the other was Redman, the Lieutenant of Roslin, whom the aforesaid astute Cochrane bribed over to our interests."

"Ah! is it so?" ejaculated Louisa. "Some such tale as this I did verily expect to hear; and methought that when bestowing sovereign titles upon the imperious Margaret, I was but doing homage to the phantom of a Queen. Was her virtue, then, so stubborn—"

"Not her virtue," interrupted the King; "but her ambition. Full well could I read her heart! She might have been Countess of Bassentyne—but she preferred the idea of wearing a diadem. It was all selfish calculation on her part."

"And now you are beset by difficulties," said Louisa, "because doubtless you dare not at once break to her that she is no Queen, but only your mistress?"

"Precisely so," answered the King.

"Perhaps you love her?" said Louisa inquiringly, after a brief pause.

"Adoringly as a mistress—but not enough to make her my wife! Yet peradventure," continued David, "if it had not been for the success of the stratagem which made her mine, I should in my infatuation have espoused her legally and openly. But I thank St. Andrew and my lucky stars—which, by the bye, have not always shone)—as well as the astuteness of Stephen Cochrane, that I was saved from the perpetration of this supreme folly!"

"And why not break the truth to her at once?" demanded the Countess, "and with a blow disentangle the web of all this tortuous; occult policy?"

"Because Margaret is not a woman to be thus dealt with," rejoined the King—"at least not for the moment. She would rave in the madness of her blighted ambition, and invoke against me all the powers she could muster on her side. My own position at this present instant is not, from a variety of circumstances, strong enough—"

"I do not understand your Grace," interjected Louisa, somewhat scornfully. "Are you not a King?"

"Aye!—but a King surrounded by a variety of troublous elements, which in a few days will be neutralized or subdued—"

"You fear the Douglas?" asked Louisa,

"That is one thing," rejoined David. "Only conceive if there were an explosion with respect to Margaret!—a young lady entrapped into a sham marriage!—what a watchword for my enemies! what a rallying cry for the discontented, the seditious, and the ill-disposed!—and I who am about to sit in judgment upon that same Earl of Douglas for the wrongs perpetrated by him against the Lady Elvira Ramsay!"

"Crush the process—smother the inquiry—stifle the plaint!" said Louisa, energetically.

"I dare not," answered the King. "I should in that case make an enemy of the Earl of Caithness, who has taken up the Lady Elvira's cause—and who at this moment, considering his manifold allies, is almost as powerful and as formidable as the Black Douglas himself. Besides, do you not know that Margaret's brother has himself become powerful? And then too, they have found a friend in the Teutonic Knight, whom for many reasons I no more dare offend than I should venture to irritate a famished lion that was loose!"

"The web is an intricate one," said Louisa; "and your Grace's policy has already received this day a signal check."

"Yes," said the King, with bitterness in his accents. "I calculated that the rumour would remain good that Margaret had fled dishonourably with Sir Louis Carlyon, an English Knight!"—and here he smiled significantly at the Countess. "Who could foresee that your party would be tracked hither to Dalkeith?"

"You should have allowed me to take Margaret on a more distant journey," interjected Louisa.

"Ridiculous!" ejaculated the King. "A thousand reasons were opposed to that idea! In the first place, there was no other retreat to which I could have consigned her, without the chance of at once betraying everything and inviting the very exposure I sought to avoid. In the second place, the very reason which induced her to accompany you at all, was that when she knew you to be the Countess of Morton she looked upon it as natural enough that you should offer her a temporary home at your husband's Castle of Dalkeith."

"I admit," said the Countess, "that these reasons were cogent. But supposing that her brother, and Sir Casimir D'Este, and the Earl of Bassentyne had not by some unaccountable means tracked her hither and created that menacing scene in the chapel,—how would you have acted?"

"My policy was well shadowed forth—and a portion of it still remains good. I should have waited until after the grand judicial proceedings at Dumbarton. There I should have struck a blow which would utterly disarm the Douglas. At the same time, by means of certain manoeuvrings, I should have got Sir Casimir D'Este so far entangled in my private policy in other respects, that he must afterwards have done everything to uphold me and naught to injure me. I should likewise have persuaded the Earl of Caithness, when at Dumbarton,

to consent to the marriage of Fleming Fitz-Allan with his daughter Albertina; for I am acquainted with a secret in respect to young Fitz-Allan which would have given me the completest power over the family into which he thus entered by marriage. Then," continued the King, "when all these matters were so disposed of, I should have broken the truth to Margaret,—telling her that her marriage with me was a delusion, and that her reputation had been ruined by the report of her having eloped with Sir Louis Carlyon, an English Knight. I should have represented to her that vainly might she proclaim the tale of her marriage: no one would believe it—and the witnesses to whom she might threaten to appeal, would deny it! I should have told her also that vainly might she declare that Sir Louis Carlyon was none other than the Countess of Morton; for the Countess herself would deny it, and would adduce ample proof to show that she had not been out of England! By all these means I had calculated that Margaret, crushed and overwhelmed, would see before her no alternative but to accept her destiny as my mistress;—and when once my own position should have been assured in the various ways that I have sketched out to you, I should have recked but little if the fact became subsequently known that Margaret Fitz-Allan was really my mistress."

"The web was sufficiently tangled," observed Louisa, shaking her head slightly.

"But there was another reason," continued the King, "why I devised the plot for Margaret's elopement with you under the guise of Sir Louis Carlyon. You see how important it is that I should avert from myself all suspicion of foul play in respect to Margaret until after this affair at Dumbarton. I have been in constant apprehension of the effects of Margaret's impatient and imperious temper: I have feared lest by some haughty look or hurried word she might afford her friends a clue to the fact that there was something between us. I therefore calculated that her supposed elopement with an English Knight would constitute a belief that would at least hold good for a few days, until after the settlement of matters at Dumbarton; and then my position would be all the safer and surer to meet a storm, if it should happen to arise."

"And how did you induce Margaret to consent to remain quiet and silent?" asked Louisa.

"I gave her to understand that so perilous was my position through the feuds and discontent of my nobles, that I should not dare reveal our marriage until after I had stricken a blow at Dumbarton in respect to the Earl of Douglas, which would convince all Scotland that I was a Monarch of energy and firmness, and by my own strong will wielding a dominant power. I assured her, in a word, that any premature declaration of our marriage would endanger the very crown she sought to wear!"

"And now," interjected the Countess of Morton, "she has fixed upon that very occasion of the approaching ceremony at Dumbarton to proclaim her supposed rights and titles!"

"Yes!—because she fancies that I shall there show my strength, and that after the blow is stricken which will destroy the power of the Douglas, she may speak out. Besides, in the waywardness of her disposition she is looking for the most public occasion to announce those supposed rights and titles to the world."

"By means of what policy," asked the Countess, "has your Grace won over—or do you propose to win over—Sir Casimir D'Este?"

"I have enlisted him in my interest: I have persuaded some apprehensions which I really entertain—devised some which exist not—and enhanced

others which are in reality insignificant. He has accepted a secret and trusty command," continued David; "and when a man such as he becomes thus devoted to a particular cause, he assuredly will not turn against it."

"But this secret," said Louisa, "which your Grace possesses in reference to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan?"

"It is one of vital importance, connected with the parentage and family of himself and his sister," answered David,—"a secret which I learnt from Margaret's own lips—and which, if revealed, would prove overwhelming."

"Then Margaret is completely in your power!" ejaculated Louisa.

"True—in *that* sense," responded the King. "But it is a power which I scarcely dare exercise—or at all events which I must keep back as the very last resource; for it would go near to brand me with infamy if my enemies could proclaim, '*Under the guileful language of love he elicited a particular revelation from the lips of the damsel whom he was about to win and betray; and then he turned round and used that secret as the dastard means of crushing her!*'"

"And this Earl of Bassentyne," said the Countess of Morton, "whose sudden appearance so much amazed and almost discomfited you—as Margaret ere now informed me."

"Ah! that is another disagreeable failure in my policy!" replied David,—"or rather I should say in that undercurrent of policy which Stephen Cochran himself directs. The young Earl might have proved troublesome—we shut him in a fortress—he has escaped, as you perceive—I as yet know not how! But, Ah! does Margaret herself suspect how he had been treated?"

"No. She was too full of wonderment at his sudden appearance. But let that pass," continued Louisa: "it is a difficulty which your Grace will doubtless be enabled to surmount. I now comprehend what your policy has been, and what it still must be. All your calculations may still hold good in respect to the results of the grand meeting at Dumbarton, provided that Margaret herself shall be prevented from appearing there?"

"Yes—that is the immense difficulty," said the King,—"the one supreme difficulty!"

"We must endeavour to grapple with it," observed the Countess: then in a musing tone she added, "Margaret is ambitious—she believes herself to be a Queen—she aspires to sit upon the Scottish throne! We must begin by giving a shock to that ambition—we must destroy it! When once that presumptuous thought is crushed—or rather, when the wish itself is converted into disgust for the dizzy and perilous position—she will be all the more ready to accept what your Grace has termed her destiny, and sink resignedly into the position of your mistress."

"True!" said the King. "But how to effect these objects, so difficult—so important!"

"Leave everything to me," rejoined the Countess: "I am far from despairing! And now, sire, speed to the monastery—make some change in your toilet—do off that corselet—assume a more courtly garb—and be pleased to join Margaret and myself at table with as little delay as possible."

"Excellent Louisa! you have inspired me with hope!" cried the King; "and I place the fullest reliance upon your promises!"

They then separated for a short space; and the moment the King had quitted the apartment, the Countess summoned Maude to her presence.

"Go," she said,—"be not startled, girl!—go to the steward Lockyer, and bid him bring me pre-

sently, under all circumstances of secrecy, the skull——"

"The skull, lady?" echoed Maude, her face turning pale.

"Yes, child!—fear not!" rejoined the Countess.

"It is the skull which is preserved in the niche behind the curtain at the extremity of the armoury."

Maude hastened with wondering brain to perform the bidding of her mistress, who awaited the arrival of the steward with the hideous object for which she had sent.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CROWNED SKULL.

WE have already hinted at the neglected condition into which Dalkeith Castle had been suffered to fall. For many years the Earl of Morton had not visited it: the Countess herself had never seen the fortalice until the present occasion: indeed she had never been in Scotland at all until she crossed the boundary in male apparel to play the part of Sir Lohis Carlyon. Such hasty arrangements as circumstances would permit had been made by the few domestics who were retained at the castle, to minister to the comfort of their noble mistress and those who had accompanied her: but these arrangements whereof we speak, had been necessarily very limited; for in the first place there was no notice given to make preparations—secondly, there was but little time for them when once the guests had arrived—and thirdly, as the presence of her ladyship and her companions was ordered to be shrouded in as much secrecy as possible, Lockyer the steward was withholden from applying to any of the neighbouring nobles or gentry for plate, costly wines, draperies, and other articles which might have given an air of cheerfulness to the gloomy apartments of the fortalice.

We need hardly add that the servants had been strictly forbidden to mention the fact that the seeming young Knight who had arrived there was none other than their noble mistress the Countess of Morton; and if she had not been the bearer of a letter from the Earl her husband to Lockyer the steward, she might perhaps have vainly asserted her right to be looked upon as the lady-peeress of the castellated mansion. The name of Margaret had been altogether suppressed; for inasmuch as only two months had elapsed since her return to Scotland, she was not personally known in the town of Dalkeith—a fact which she had not omitted to mention to the Countess. Indeed, all the arrangements had been so made that it was at first hoped that no pursuers from Roslin could possibly track the party to Dalkeith Castle; and inasmuch as it was only purposed (for the reasons which have already transpired) to throw a veil of mystery over the whole proceedings for a few days—indeed until after the grand events which were expected to take place at Dumbarton—it was deemed that in so short an interval no researches nor inquiries instituted from Roslin Castle would succeed in tracking the fugitives, the more especially as on the following day it was known that the principal personages there would have to set off for Dumbarton. All these calculations had however been frustrated by that chain of events which had thrown the Earl of Bassentyne in the way of Sir Casimir D'Este and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, and had enabled him to impart that information which had taken them straight to Dalkeith.

The reader will of course understand that it was



in reality no business-visit to the royal burgh, no sudden pleasure-freak, and no accidental circumstances, which had brought the King to Dalkeith precisely at this juncture: it was a prearranged appointment according to which he was to meet Margaret there. The friars of St. John were too much indebted to the royal favour in a variety of ways, to look very closely into the proceedings of the Monarch. Thus, when they found that so far from having the intention of accepting the banquet which on his arrival at the monastery they ordered to be prepared for him, he purposed to sup with the ladies who had arrived at the castle, they at once placed at the disposal of the steward Lockyer whatsoever materials he might require for furnishing a repast suitable for Royalty and Royalty's companions. The Abbot would have paid his respects to the Countess of Morton, on hearing it confidentially whispered by Lockyer that her ladyship was at the castle: but the reverend Father was assured that her ladyship desired to maintain the strictest privacy, and therefore that ceremony was dispensed with. But Lockyer took especial care that the banquet should be well served up; for he was shrewd enough to perceive that something peculiar was in progress—while on the other hand he was discreet enough to have an air as if nothing at all remarkable were going on. And to this prudent line of conduct he was the more especially inclined from the fact that the King slipped a few broad pieces into his hand, bidding him take care that whatsoever passed within those walls should not be talked of out-of doors. We should observe that the youthful domestic who in the first instance had conducted the three warriors to the suite of apartments where he had intimated to them that they would find the object of their search, was as ignorant as the rest that the dark-eyed lady was Margaret Fitz-Allan: and it was only because it was so imperiously mentioned by Sir Casimir D'Este that a lady had been carried off from Roslin, that it naturally struck the young man that the dark-eyed beauty aforesaid must be the one to whom allusion was thus made.

Having given these requisite little explanations, we may resume the thread of our narrative. The great banquetting-hall of Dalkeith Castle was in too dismantled a condition to serve for the reception of guests; and even were the contrary the case, that apartment would have been too gloomy in its spaciousness for the use of so small a party. Lockyer had therefore chosen a smaller room for the little banquet; and he had rendered it as comfortable as all circumstances, including the appliances furnished from the adjacent monastery, would permit. And now we behold the King, Margaret, and the Countess of Morton, seated at the table, on which a succulent repast was served up. Lockyer himself, with his chain of office, stood as a servitor behind the King, who for the occasion dispensed with the attendance of any of the escort that had accompanied him from Edinburgh. Maude and Minnie, both elegantly attired, were there to minister to Margaret and the Countess: but while the repast was in progress, the three principal personages were careful to converse only on general topics, and to avoid every allusion to whatsoever matters were perhaps otherwise uppermost in their minds. We may as well observe that so long as she remained in the room, Maude—the elder of the two girls—furtively surveyed Margaret with looks of the deepest curiosity and interest.

When the dishes were removed and the dessert was placed upon the table, Lockyer, Maude, and Minnie withdrew, on a signal from the Countess; so that the King and the two ladies, being now left

alone together, could indulge in unrestrained discourse.

"I have been thinking, dearest Margaret," said the Monarch, "that it would be more consistent with the strictest prudence—and in this opinion I may or may not be supported by our kind friend the Countess of Morton—"

"Best assured, sire," interjected Louisa, who thus spoke for appearance' sake in Margaret's presence, "that in whatsoever matter your Grace may deign to consult me, I shall deliver my sentiments impartially—and all the more so if the affair itself concerns my beloved friend who permits me to call her Margaret, but towards whom I can never forget the deference and respect due to a Queen."

"Yes—call me Margaret, dear Louisa!" said that lady, thanking her with a look of gratitude for the seeming kindness of this speech: "for it is sweet to have the good fellowship of one of my own sex!"

"And is not my presence, dearest Margaret," said the King, in that soft bland insinuating tone which he knew so well how to assume, and who indeed was always more or less under the influence of the spell of Margaret's exceeding beauty when in her society,—"is not my presence sufficient to bring smiles to those sweet lips and joy into those handsome dark eyes?"

"Yes, sire," she replied,—"when you seem to do your duty towards me—"

"Ah! does this species of proviso mean to imply a reproach?" ejaculated the Monarch, with a half-deprecating glance at Margaret.

"Truth compels me to acknowledge, sire," she rejoined, "that throughout the scene in the chapel there was a straining and a readiness to ignore me utterly in certain respects—a sort of repudiation—of which, notwithstanding the necessities of policy, I could scarcely have deemed you so thoroughly capable."

"Say not so, my beloved!" exclaimed the King "such language from your lips afflicts me cruelly! I was compelled to act a certain part, and could not perform that part by halves. Let us not travel over again the pathway of reasoning and argument, as well as of explanation, which we have already accomplished. I tell you, my beloved, in one word—and the Countess of Morton, as an unbiased and impartial judge of passing events, can corroborate the assertion—that it is consistent with my most vital interests for the declaration of our marriage to be postponed until *after* the coming events at Dumbarton."

"You mean, sire," rejoined Margaret emphatically, "until after the trial of the Earl of Douglas? Be it so! I have already assented to this arrangement,—though with much pain and violence to my own feelings, as the scene in the oratorio may have sufficiently demonstrated. But immediately after that trial—on the same day—on the same occasion—when your Highness shall be surrounded with the great paladins of Scotland and the nobles of your court—and chiefly, too, in the presence of my benefactor the Earl of Caithness, my noble-hearted brother, and the good Knight Sir Casimir D'Este, now the friend and guest at Roslin—will it be expedient for your Majesty to take me by the hand and introduce me as your bride—your Queen!"

"This is the very point, dearest Margaret," said the King, "on which I was just now about to speak when appealing to the Countess of Morton for her own impartial opinion. In a word, Margaret, I beseech you to allow the incidents of Dumbarton to pass over—to remain here for a few days, with your friend the Countess—and to suffer me to effect at Edinburgh such preparations as shall be fitting for

the acknowledgment which I am as desirous to make as you can possibly be to have made."

"And moreover," hastily chimed in the Countess of Morton, "it were far more proper that Scotland's Queen should be proclaimed in Scotland's capital!"

"Not so," interjected Margaret, forcing herself to speak mildly: "for if the King, in consideration of State reasons, may choose to hold his court at Dumbarton, at Dumbarton likewise may he proclaim that which for a thousand reasons ought not to be any longer delayed."

"And you will not, Margaret," said David entreatingly, "render me this little favour which I implore!"

"Oh! ask me, sire," she exclaimed, "to do anything rather than make any further sacrifice of my good name and repute! You yourself cannot feel otherwise than jealous of the fair renown of your own wife: and if in no instance, sire, should the reputation of a wife be compromised, infinitely less should this be the case when that wife owns a King as her husband! Therefore I pray you, sire, let there be no delay in that public acknowledgment which is now all that is wanting to ensure the happiness of her whom you love,—the more especially as a certain solemn pledge was given this day in the chapel to that brother who has a right to demand an account of his sister's actions, and to those friends who are interested in her!"

The King would have persevered in the argument; but the Countess of Morton touched him with her foot under the table: and he comprehended that she meant to imply he would be going too far, and that he had better leave Margaret to her management, according to the understanding to which he had already come with Louisa during their private interview previous to the banquet. David therefore turned the discourse into another channel; and now Margaret, conceiving that she had thoroughly gained her point, became full of good spirits, discoursed cheerfully, and felt her mind to be almost completely at rest.

The hour for retiring came. The King delicately intimated that for appearance' sake he should return into the monastery, but only to steal forth thence again presently to join his beloved Margaret in her chamber. The Countess withdrew, attended by Minnie; while Maude was attached for the nonce to the especial service of Margaret. This young damsel, however, repaired in the first instance to the Countess of Morton's apartment, to procure from her mail-trunk a package of necessaries which Margaret had provided previous to her departure from Roslin. Margaret therefore proceeded alone in the first instance to her own suite of apartments. These consisted of an ante-room and bed-chamber; and they were in the neighbourhood of the private entrance from the monastery, so that the King might easily reach them without the danger of being observed by any of the castle domestics.

Margaret entered the ante-room, where lights were burning. There were four tapers upon the table: but good heavens! what a spectacle did they reveal!—and with what a convulsive shuddering of the form did the superb Margaret start back from the ghastly sight that was before her! For there, in the centre of that table—upon a red velvet cushion—was a human skull, on which a crown was placed! With its gleaming white teeth and its eyeless sockets it seemed to be grinning in horrible mockery at Margaret, as if with all the concentrated effect of one tremendous lesson conveyed in a moment and at a glance, the fearful spectacle meant to strike her impressively with the vanity of her desire to wear a sovereign crown!

So great was the shock that even the ejaculation

of dismay and affright which for an instant came up to the very margin of the lady's lips, was paralyzed and stifled; she tottered towards the doorway—and pale as death, she kept her eyes riveted as if with a horrible fascination upon the ghastly object. But in another moment a light footstep met her ear: she recovered herself—she turned, and beheld Maude. This young damsel threw one glance at the grim spectacle: she shuddered slightly—but her look was not sufficiently astonished or affrighted to convey the idea that the fearful object had burst upon her without the faintest foreknowledge that her vision would encounter it there.

"Maude!" exclaimed Margaret, catching the young girl violently by the wrist, and fixing a fierce menacing regard upon her; "you knew of this!"

"Yes, lady," responded Maude, sinking at Margaret's feet; "and it was my purpose to tell you everything!—otherwise I should have affected a horror and dismay which I did not in reality feel, for the simple reason that I knew what was here!"

"You knew it? But rise, girl—rise!" said Margaret. "There is sincerity in your look! Deal frankly with me—and I will prove the best friend you ever knew!"

"Yes, lady," replied the damsel, raising herself up from her suppliant posture: "I will deal frankly with you: it was my intention! For there was something in your manner towards me which made me like you—and then methought that all the proceedings that were passing around, meant hostility to your happiness—"

"Good Maude!" exclaimed Margaret, caressing the girl's beautiful face with her hand: "you shall not repent this! I will never forget it! But tell me at once—whose hideous handiwork was this?"—and she pointed towards the grim spectacle upon the table.

"It pains me to speak against a mistress whom I have hitherto loved," began Maude, "and who has ever been kind to me—"

"Ah! then the Countess did this?" said Margaret, in a low deep voice, while a dark vindictive expression swept over her superb countenance. "But tell me, Maude—do you know who I am? I mean, has the Countess initiated you more deeply into certain secrets than I had supposed? What, girl! are you blushing? do you hang down your head? How mean you? But again let me ask, do you know who I am?"

"Yes, lady," murmuringly responded the damsel; "you are Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan;"—and then she added hesitatingly and tremulously, "And you possess the favour of the King."

"Ah!" ejaculated Margaret, stamping her foot with rage: "it is thus that my good name—But how absurd is my anger against you, girl! You are ignorant of the great secret—and the conjecture which you have sought in the most delicate language to imply, is natural enough! But you are dealing with me in confidence—and I will likewise deal with you in confidence! Listen, Maude! I am not the degraded mistress of Royalty—I am not a Monarch's light-o'-love, nor his wanton paramour! As true as you have a soul to be saved, I am Scotland's Queen!"

The damsel started for a few moments: she gazed, confounded and bewildered, upon Margaret's countenance:—then smitten with the conviction that it was nothing more than actual truth which had been proclaimed to her, she again sank upon her knees, murmuring, "Pardon me, gracious Queen! I knew not that I was in the presence of Majesty!"

"Rise, Maude," said Margaret, hastily lifting up the kneeling girl: "you volunteered to serve me when you deemed that I was naught more than a

Monarch's mistress: but you shall enjoy the friendship of Scotland's Queen! And now tell me quickly—answer me, I conjure you! Was the King—my husband—was he, I ask, in any way privy—Yet, Oh! I dare not think so!”

“I know nothing more, may it please your Highness,” answered Maude, “than this—that the Countess ordered me to bid Lockyer bring that skull from the armoury. It has long been kept there. I myself have heard the Earl of Morton recite a legend concerning it. But of that no matter now! I acquitted myself of my mission to Lockyer; and he received certain private instructions from the Countess. The result is there!”—and she pointed towards the grim object on the table. “Just now, when I went to her ladyship's chamber to fetch this packet, she forewarned me of what I should behold, so that I might not swoon with sudden terror: but she bade me keep secret as to what I knew in respect to her complicity in the horrible handiwork. Yet at that very moment my mind was made up to speak frankly to your Highness!”

“And think you, Maude,” inquired Margaret, with a strong suffocating sensation in the throat, and with an outward betrayal of emotion which it was impossible she could altogether subdue, —“think you that the King, my husband, was an accomplice or an instigator—?”

The idea flashed to the damsel's mind at the moment that the King might well be acquainted with the proceeding, inasmuch as it was immediately after his interview with the Countess that she had summoned the girl to bid her go and order Lockyer to fetch the skull. That idea which thus struck her, was betrayed by her looks; and Margaret said in a low, hoarse, and almost choking voice, “Enough! I understand you!”

“Oh! what can I do to serve you?” exclaimed Maude passionately,—“unacknowledged Queen that you are!—and doubtless an injured one too!”

“Tranquillize yourself, my dear girl,” said Margaret, with a sombre resoluteness of look. “I know the game that I have to play—and I will play it! Insensates that they are!” she exclaimed, with a scornful glance at the crowned skull, “to suppose that their ridiculous juggling will strike terror into my soul, or make me pause in my purpose! But I must dissemble before the King for the present!—I must dissemble!” she muttered between her lips. “Ah!” she ejaculated, again flinging a contemptuous look toward the table; “whence came the crown?”

“If your Majesty will regard it closely,” responded Maude, “you will perceive that it is a rude one of base metal and but little value, hastily furnished up for this occasion;—and it was taken from the head of a statue of King Robert Bruce, which may be seen in the armoury. I recognise it now: for Minnie and I wandered into the armoury this afternoon—”

“Enough, Maude!” interrupted Margaret; “my royal husband will soon be coming! Away with this ghastly relic! My looks shall seem to bespeak that naught unpleasant has occurred; so that if he be really in the odious plot, he shall deem that it has miscarried, and his mind shall remain mystified upon the subject. Ah! here is a cupboard that will serve our purpose!”

Thus speaking, Margaret flung open the door of a large old-fashioned wardrobe, and into the recess she tossed the skull and the brass crown that had been furnished up for the hideous display. Closing the door of the closet, she flung the cushion back into the seat of the arm-chair from which it had evidently been taken; and she then said, with a look of sombre triumph, “As I have thus in a

moment cast aside the objects that were grouped together to dismay and horrify me,—so will I with equal facility scatter all the projects of my enemies. Ah, Countess of Morton! I know you now! Ah, David!” she added, in a lower tone, “you will find that you have to deal with a woman of the sternest energy and most indomitable resolution!”

Maude in the meanwhile was arranging upon the toilet-table in the adjacent chamber, the articles which she had taken from the packet. Margaret joined her there; and by the young damsel's aid she disapparelled herself.

“And now good night, my young friend,” said Margaret, imprinting a kiss upon Maude's smooth white forehead. “Be secret, and be discreet! I need not bid you be faithful! Watch the proceedings of the Countess: for even during the few hours that I shall yet remain here, she may be plotting schemes of a more dangerous character than the ridiculous exhibition which she vainly devised to terrify me. And be prepared, Maude, to accompany me betimes to-morrow—perhaps openly, perhaps stealthily, according to circumstances.”

The young damsel retired; and Margaret composed her countenance as completely as if nothing had occurred to ruffle it, by the time that her royal husband made his appearance in the chamber. There was however nothing in David's looks to corroborate the idea of his complicity in the odious plot of the Countess;—and this the reader need not wonder at, for the King was altogether unaware that such a ghastly exhibition had been devised.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MAUDE.

It was as early as six o'clock in the morning when the King rose to take his departure. He had not as yet breathed another word in renewal of the argument or entreaty to induce Margaret to remain at Dalkeith for the present, instead of proceeding to Dumbarton according to the intention which she had proclaimed: but he now deliberated with himself whether he should revive the topic for the last time ere he took his departure, or whether he should trust everything to the ingenuity of the Countess of Morton.

“She sleeps,” said the King, gazing upon the handsome countenance which was enframed as it were by the masses of luxuriant raven hair that flowed all over the pillow: “she sleeps!—and it will seem kind and considerate on my part not to disturb her at this early hour. Yes—'twill be better that I should leave her thus! If I awake her it would be almost an absolute necessity for me to revert to the argument of last evening at the banquet-table: or else 'twould seem most strange that I should not demand where we are next to meet—whether it be at Dumbarton to-morrow, or whether it be here at Dalkeith again in a few days? And then, too, she herself would be certain to revive the topic; and 'twere better that all should be left to Louisa's practical management than that the matter should again furnish food for mere wordy parlance.”

Having thus made up his mind how to act, the King hastened to apparel himself as gently and noiselessly as possible; and when his toilet was completed, he again approached the couch, to contemplate once more the wondrously handsome face of her who was reposing there. So thick were the ebon fringes of her eyes that they now formed

deeply-pencilled black lines dividing with graceful curves the upper from the lower lids. The lips were slightly apart, affording a glimpse of the ivory teeth within. The beams of July's morning sun, penetrating through an opening in the draperies of the casement, were now just reaching Margaret's countenance; and they imparted an additional glow to the carnation that appeared upon each soft cheek through the transparent brunette tint of the complexion. One arm was almost completely buried beneath the masses of the raven hair which flowed around her faultlessly shaped head; the other arm, bare to the shoulder, lay upon the coverlid of dark velvet, so that its admirable modelling was completely thrown out as it were from that dark background. The King felt as if he must imprint upon the rich red lips such a kiss as would awaken the sleeper; for at that moment his passion amounted almost to adoration, so exceedingly beautiful did she appear! But he restrained himself so far as merely just to touch her cheek caressingly with his own lips; and then he stole forth from the apartment.

At that early hour in the morning the King did not expect to see the Countess of Morton nor to receive any communication from her: he fancied that as yet she had found no time to strike a blow, nor even to take the initiative in respect to any plans which she might entertain for the detention of Margaret at Dalkeith. Thus through the silent and deserted corridor the monarch pursued his way: he speedily entered the conventional establishment adjoining; and having partaken of a hasty repast, he took his departure, attended by his escort.

Scarcely had the King quitted Margaret's chamber, when she opened her large dark eyes, and a smile of triumph appeared upon her lips. She had not been really asleep at the time when the King was contemplating her so lovingly:—but she on her own part was now playing a game of caution and dissimulation,—and she had chosen to appear as if still wrapped in the arms of slumber. For she too, on her own side, wished to avoid a recurrence to the topic of the preceding evening: she did not choose to be drawn into a positive pledge not to go to Dumbarton—while on the other hand she feared that if she persisted in enunciating such to be her purpose, the King and the Countess might adopt some desperate measure to prevent her. Thus she had considered that the best and safest course was to avoid any renewal of the subject to which we have so often referred; and hence the semblance of sleep which she had maintained until the King took his departure.

Shortly afterwards Maude entered the chamber. Margaret embraced her with an affectionate warmth; for she felt convinced that the young damsel was faithful—and she indeed required the services of one in whose truth and sincerity she could put trust!

"Tell me, Maude," said Margaret, "have you seen the Countess?"

"I have just left her, may it please your Majesty," replied the girl.

"Ah! then she likewise has risen betimes?" said Margaret. "Has there been aught of interview or communication betwixt this treacherous Countess and my royal husband—I mean this morning, my young friend?"

"Oh, assuredly not, gracious Highness," rejoined the damsel. "I beheld his Majesty enter the courtyard of the monastery—there is a window which commands a view thereof—and in the meanwhile I was with Minnie in the ante-room of Lady Morton's apartments. But I fear —"

"You fear?" echoed Margaret, seeing that the

damsel stopped short, and that a gloom overspread her beautiful countenance. "What new treachery or device on the Countess of Morton's part do you apprehend, girl?"

"I fear, your Highness," responded Maude, "that you will find yourself more or less a prisoner here—"

"A prisoner?" ejaculated Margaret, her countenance flushing with indignation: "it would only require that crowning tyranny and disgrace to goad me to desperation! But tell me, minion," proceeded Margaret, in a less excited tone—and we should observe that the term by which she had just addressed the girl was frequently used in those times as one of affectionate endearment on the part of a mistress towards a favourite damsel—"tell me, minion, what reason have you for the supposition? In short, tell me everything which you may deem it requisite for me to know."

"Last night, may it please your Highness," resumed Maude, "I returned to the ante-chamber of the Countess, after having here assisted to disapparel your Grace. The Countess was most anxious to ascertain the effect produced upon your Highness by the spectacle of the crowned skull. She therefore questioned me without delay: but I scarcely knew how to answer. Your Majesty had previously given me no instructions on the point; and yet, from your manner, and likewise from some few words which I caught dropping from your lips, I was convinced that it was your Grace's main object to mystify the authors of that ghastly device, and leave them in the dark in reference to the particular effect it might have produced upon your mind. Therefore, under that impression, I shaped my own course accordingly. I assured the Countess that I was unable to judge of the matter—for I declared that when I entered the ante-room belonging to your Grace's apartments, I beheld nothing of the grisly sight—it was all cleared away—skull and crown had disappeared—and the tapers were dispersed about as if with a negligence that was altogether unstudied."

"Ah! you told the Countess all this, girl?" exclaimed Margaret. "In good sooth, you acted well! For the observance of mystery—or rather, I should say, the leaving of mine enemies in doubt upon all points on which it behoves them to seek information, is now the policy best suited to my particular and painful circumstances. But what said the Countess when you told her that the ghastly spectacle had disappeared previous to your entrance into the ante-room?"

"She looked amazed," replied Maude, "and then she put a rapid series of questions. Had I noticed anything peculiar in your countenance? had you said anything at all relating to the matter? did you appear indignant or frightened? was there a flush upon your cheeks, or were you pale?—These were the queries put to me by the Countess."

"And how answered you all these questions?" inquired Margaret.

"In such a strain, your Grace, as to leave the Countess still plunged in mystery and doubt. She was evidently bewildered what to think: and at length I heard her mutter to herself, 'Her mind is stronger than I thought: perhaps she only laughs inwardly at that which I fancied would appal and overwhelm. This blow has therefore doubtless failed to strike with any important effect: and measures still more strenuous must be had recourse to.'—These were the words which I caught the Countess murmuring to herself. Nothing more of any consequence occurred last evening—"

"But this morning, Maude,—this morning?" demanded Margaret eagerly: "what has transpired?"

"The Countess rose early," continued Maude; "and then she bade Minnie speed and summon Lockyer. The steward was not long in making his appearance. The Countess issued her mandates in a low tone—I could not catch all she said—but I heard enough—"

"What was it that you heard?" asked Margaret. "Speak quick, dear Maude—and let me know the worst."

"I overheard the Countess bid Lockyer take care that the hostlers should be absent with the keys of the stable—that no one should be able to find those knaves when inquired for—while as for breaking open the door, if a command to this effect were issued, such a course was to be declared utterly impracticable. Then, as to hiring other steeds in the town, or borrowing them from the monastery,—these also were to be impossibilities—"

"Ah! every difficulty is to be thrown in my way?" ejaculated Margaret: "every obstacle is to be devised to prevent my journey to Dumbarton? But as long as positive coercion be not used, I will yet effect my object! Tell me, Maude—was more said by the Countess to Lockyer?"

"Yes, gracious lady," responded the damsel. "If as the hours wore on, it were found no longer possible to assert the absence of the hostlers as an excuse for refusing admission to the stable—then, in this case, Lockyer was to take care that your steed should be found to be dead lame—"

"Oh, the foul treachery!" ejaculated Margaret.

"Nay, more, gracious Queen," continued Maude, "the Countess bade Lockyer observe that if you should insist upon having another steed—if, in short, you should prove resolute in clearing away all the difficulties that might be raised against your egress hence—the portcullis is to be lowered, sentinels are to be posted—"

"Ah! coercion!" cried Margaret: "prisonage! captivity! Is it really so, Maude? You are certain, girl, that your ears did not deceive you?"

"Alas, no, your Highness!" replied the damsel: "as plainly as human ears ever heard syllables spoken from human lips, did I catch what was thus said to Lockyer! It was also in this wise that the Countess spoke:—'Throw every obstacle in the way, Lockyer; multiply difficulty upon difficulty, as if it were all a series of unfortunate accidents; veil our real purpose as long as possible: but if it be necessary to throw off the mask at last, and retain her a prisoner within the castle-walls, it must be done! In a word, I hold you responsible, good Lockyer, that she leaves not the castle until free and full permission be given to that effect!'—Thus spoke the Countess to the steward; for though her voice was still low, yet it was with emphasis and energy—with resoluteness indeed—that she enunciated her instructions. And Lockyer," added Maude, in a sorrowful accent, "is evidently a man who will obey them to the very letter!"

"Ah! then it has come to this," exclaimed Margaret,—"that I am a prisoner within the walls of a fortress! Yes—and a prisoner with the consent and complicity of my own husband! This is likewise but too clear! Yet for what purpose am I thus detained?—why am I thus outraged? Simply to prevent the speedy proclamation of the fact that I am King David's bride—the Queen of Scotland! But that I am his bride he dares not deny!—that I am his Queen he cannot disprove! Aye—and I will at once act as a Queen! This present emergency gives an impulse to my energies. Go you and summon Lockyer hither. I will reveal myself unto him as Scotland's Queen!—I will command him at his peril to throw open the stables and bring forth the steeds—But, ah, Maude! why gaze you thus

singularly—thus despairingly upon me? Is there aught in the background?—anything you have left untold? Speak, dear girl, speak! I must know everything!—nor must you through fear or pity, or any other feeling, keep back whatsoever more you may have to impart!"

"Gracious lady," said Maude, falling upon her knees at the feet of Margaret, who was now seated in an arm-chair at her toilet-table, "pardon me for the pain which I am about to cause!—do not think that I would willingly plant a dagger in the heart which alas, I perceive is already so deeply wounded! But, Oh! it is indeed necessary that you should know everything! I had not told you quite all. I omitted the last words which I overheard the Countess speak to Lockyer—"

"And those words, Maude?" said Margaret; "repeat them, and fear not that you will overwhelm me with whatsoever pain they may inflict. I have already suffered too much—But enough! Speak, dear Maude!"

The young girl held down her countenance, as she said in a low hesitating voice, "The Countess spoke thus to Lockyer:—'Poor Margaret Fitz-Allan is more or less demented: she believes that because the King has deigned to select her as the object of love's pastime, she is virtually a wedded Queen. Therefore, Lockyer, you will know how to meet her humours, her airs, and her fancies, if she should take it into her head to display them!'—It was thus that the Countess spoke."

All vital colouring fled from Margaret's countenance as she listened to the words thus repeated by Maude: her brunette complexion became of a dull, dead, sallowish white; her very lips were white also, but her eyes burnt like red-hot cinders. Tremendous was the effect thus produced upon her by the words which the young damsel had repeated! That effect, however, quickly passed away—at least to all outward appearance: her complexion acquired its natural delicate duskiness of tint—her skin again appeared fine-grained and transparent—the carnation came back to her cheeks—and the rich redness to the lips. Then as she slowly raised the kneeling Maude, Margaret said, "And what think you now, girl, after the speech which you overheard the Countess of Morton address to the steward Lockyer?"

"I still believe you to be Scotland's Queen," answered the damsel, "because I feel convinced that you must be the King's wife! There is too much dignity—too much natural pride about you, lady, to permit me to believe that you are the monarch's mistress! No! you are his bride—his Queen!—and the humble Maude will serve you until the very death! But Lockyer—ah, no! it is different with him!—he will not believe as I do! He will not serve your Grace!"

Margaret—although by no means naturally of a tender heart, nor very susceptible of the finer feelings which vibrate only along the most delicate chords of the soul—was nevertheless much affected by the ingenuous earnestness and even loving devotion which the young damsel displayed. She accordingly embraced her, saying, "Maude, I repeat what I proclaimed last night: I will never forget this conduct on your part—and you shall enjoy the friendship of Scotland's Queen!"

The young girl wept upon Margaret's bosom; and then suddenly drying her tears, she said, "What is to be done now, gracious lady? Give me your instructions; for I myself am no prisoner—at least I hope and believe not; and therefore, if I can go anywhere—if I can invoke the aid of any one—"

"Yes," ejaculated Margaret, "you can perhaps save me, Maude! Speed you to Roslin—the dis-

tance is but seven or eight miles—you may obtain a steed somewhere in this neighbourhood—”

“And even if I walked, gracious Queen, every inch of the way, until my feet were sore and bleeding, still would I go!”—and Maude’s words and looks betrayed the fervour of an enthusiastic sincerity.

“Excellent girl! you will yet save me!” cried Margaret. “Speed you to Roslin!—doubtless it will be too late for you to see the Earl of Caithness—or Sir Casimir D’Este—or my noble-hearted brother—for they will have set off for Dumbarton. But you may see Redman—or if he should not be there, you may see Hepburn—you may invoke their aid—in a word, tell them you come from me—that I am a prisoner at Dalkeith—and they will send a force of brave warriors to deliver me!”

“I go!” exclaimed Maude; “and rest assured, royal lady, that though the hours may seem long to you ere deliverance come, yet that on my part there shall not be a moment’s waste of time!”

With these words the young damsel took Margaret’s hand and carried it to her lips with an air of mingled respect and tenderness. She then glided from the apartment; and Margaret mentally ejaculated, “Oh, if *she* were false likewise, what would become of me? But no! no!” she instantaneously added, smitten with a sudden sense of shame at the ungenerous thought; “if ever there was sincerity in the human heart, Maude is sincere!”

Margaret now completed her toilet, and was just wondering whether it were possible for her to compose her features sufficiently to meet the Countess of Morton without betraying the fact that her treachery was known, when she heard the outer door of the suite of apartments open. She hastily passed from the chamber into the ante-room; and there she encountered Maude, from whom she had parted nearly half-an-hour back.

“Alas!” exclaimed Margaret, now feeling as if all her courage were failing her, and she should become completely dejected and cast down; “has the last hope perished? has the last resource been annihilated?”

“Oh no,—not so, gracious Queen!” responded Maude, on whose countenance hopefulness and joy were now expanding beneath the suspenseful breathless expression which it had worn at the moment she re-entered the room. “Heaven has sent your Highness aid from an unexpected quarter! Come quick, lady—come quick!—and you shall be free!”

“What mean you, Maude?” demanded Margaret, her heart beating with wild joy for an instant—and then its pulsations were suddenly stilled, and the blood seemed to congeal in her veins as she was smitten with the idea that some new treachery was intended and that Maude was faithless after all!

“Come quick, gracious lady, I repeat!” exclaimed the damsel. “There is not a moment to lose! Come, quick! in a few minutes you shall be free!”

Again did Margaret experience a sudden sensation of self-reproach and shame for the mistrust with which she had regarded the girl, whose ingenuous countenance was beaming with delight mingled with suspense—with hopefulness and most earnest entreaty. Margaret saw that something new had transpired which evidently had given quite a different turn to the progress of circumstances; and now that her confidence in Maude was all in a moment restored, she did not care to wait for explanations. Hastily throwing on her head-dress and her scarf, Margaret followed Maude from the room. The passage outside, led on the one hand towards the principal staircase, and on the other hand towards the private entrance into the adjoining monastery. What, therefore, was Margaret’s surprise, mingled

with renewed distrust, when Maude hastily led the way in the latter direction?

“Whither are we going?” she demanded, in a hasty whisper.

“This way!” responded Maude. “In the name of all the blessed saints, be silent and be discreet, gracious Queen!”

“But the corridor leads to the monastery!” interjected Margaret, bewildered and irresolute. “Those priests are naught but the willing servitors of the King’s pleasure!”

It was almost an expression of despair which struck the beautiful countenance of Maude, as she said in a voice of the most earnest entreaty, “For heaven’s sake come! Safety lies before you!—who can tell what dangers lie behind? Behold, lady—a dozen paces—”

“And we enter the monastery!” said Margaret, quivering all over with suspense and bewilderment, so that her natural self-possession was almost lost.

“But there! there! on the very threshold,” ejaculated Maude, “are the disguises which will ensure our safety. Behold them!”

At the extremity of the ill-lighted and obscure corridor Margaret could discern some dark articles of raiment lying on the stone floor: and she hastened with Maude to the spot. The disguises proved to be two cowls, or monkish gowns, belonging to the Cistercian Order of *Irish*, and to which order, be it remembered, belonged the holy brotherhood of Melrose. But the monks of St. John, who peopled the adjacent monastery of Dalkeith, belonged to quite a different order, and wore a very different costume. These facts struck Margaret in a moment: she was seized with fresh misgivings—indeed she was cruelly perplexed,—inspired by the hope of escape on the one hand, and yet tortured on the other by the dread of precipitating herself into some cunningly laid pit-fall.

“Lady,” cried Maude, perceiving that Margaret again hesitated, “if the Countess of Morton should happen to appear at the extremity of this passage, your Highness is lost! I implore you to come! There! don this priestly garb!—draw the cowl over your head! Now it is complete!”

The disguise had been assumed and arranged in a few moments,—Margaret abandoning herself as it were to her fate. The next instant Maude slipped on the other Cistercian gown: and then she gave three low but distinct taps at a door which was deeply set in the wall at the extremity of the passage. The door was immediately opened; and a monk made his appearance at the head of the steps within the threshold. He evidently did not belong to the brotherhood of St. John, for he wore the Cistercian garb, the same as Margaret and Maude themselves.

“What means all this?” inquired Margaret, bewildered and astounded more and more at each successive incident.

“It means that you are with a friend, daughter,” responded the monk, “and he will conduct you through the monastery in safety.”

It immediately struck Margaret that she recognised the voice of the friar: she then scrutinized his features as well as the dim light of the place would permit: and as joy flamed up in her heart, she ejaculated, “Yes, I am not mistaken!—you are Father Cyrus of Melrose!”

“The same,” rejoined the holy monk. “But speak not a word! retain your cowl completely over your countenance—and follow me!”

All Margaret’s suspicions and misgivings had vanished in a moment; and once more so ashamed was she of her want of confidence in Maude that she could have caught the young damsel in her arms and embraced her with fervid vehemence. But she con-

tented herself with simply bestowing a pressure of the hand on the damsel; and then they both followed Father Cyrus. This was the good monk, be it recollected, who had acted as Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan's assessor and advocate at the memorable trial which took place at Melrose Abbey. But how he should now be at the monastery of St. John at Dalkeith, ready and able to render her such signal succour—and how Maude could possibly have fallen in with him in such a way as to bring about all that was now passing—Margaret was utterly at a loss to conceive. However she felt certain that all was straightforward and free from treachery now: and it was therefore with an exultant heart, and with a step far too elastic and light for a holy friar, that Margaret, clad in her Cistercian disguise, and accompanied by Maude, followed Father Cyrus.

The monk led the way down a dimly lighted descent of stone steps to a landing that communicated with the suite of apartments which the King occupied when at the monastery: for it was within the walls of the monastery that Margaret and Maude now found themselves. Perilous situation!—for it was death for females to penetrate stealthily into an establishment of holy fathers!—death likewise for a friar to introduce the female sex within the walls of a monastery! But it was not the occasion to give way to apprehensions: the monk of Melrose seemed very certain in respect to the part which he himself was performing—Margaret, naturally strong-minded, was full of confidence when once the idea of treachery was banished from her mind—and the beautiful Maude appeared to be resolute in following in the footsteps of the lady to whose service she had become attached.

The landing which communicated with the royal apartments, was threaded: Father Cyrus opened a door—and glancing round, he said, addressing his two female companions, "Assume, I pray ye, as much as possible a gait that shall befit the garbs which ye wear. Do this—and fear nothing!"

They now entered a garden, where some half-dozen monks belonging to the monastery of St. John, were rambling: and this enclosure the little party traversed. A gate in the opposite wall admitted them into the court-yard—of which, as the reader has already learnt, a view might be obtained from the windows of the suite of apartments in the castle occupied by the Countess of Morton. Margaret and Maude did not however look round: but still keeping the hoods of their monkish disguises closely over their faces, they followed in the footsteps of the friar of Melrose who was their guide. There were several monks belonging to the monastery, as well as hostlers and other underlings, in the court-yard: but unsuspected, the lady and her young dependant proceeded in their midst. At length they reached the gates: the wicket was at once opened by the lay-brother who acted as porter: a few footsteps, and they were beyond the precincts of the holy establishment. They could now obtain a view of the gate of the castle; and there they beheld Lady Morton's two grim men-at-arms who had accompanied her from England, mounting guard;—and Margaret felt convinced that they were there to bar her passage in case she should have attempted to issue by that means of egress from the fortalice. She thus comprehended why Maude had been in such haste to get her safely out of the castle, and why she had adopted this singular method,—though she was still utterly at a loss to conjecture how the young girl had fallen in with Father Cyrus, or how the monk had been led to enlist himself in her service.

But she could afford to exercise her patience on these points, for she felt that she was breathing the

fresh air of freedom. The bell of the monastery proclaimed the hour of eight as Father Cyrus struck into a path leading towards the open country; and Margaret thought exultingly within herself, "The whole day is yet before me; and despite all former evil omens, the present augury is so good that I may reckon upon reaching Dumbarton ere sunset!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SILENT ESCORT.

FATHER CYRUS led the way towards a small but thick grove, at a distance of about half a mile; and all this time he spoke not a single word—nor did Margaret deem it right to be the first to break silence. They entered the grove; and the monk of Melrose still led the way through its deep embowering shades, until an open space was reached; and there a little tent was standing.

"Now, lady," he said, addressing himself to Margaret, "my task is ended. I can give you no explanation of the course which I have been pursuing—for the simple reason that I am utterly ignorant of the causes of your captivity in Dalkeith Castle, and the motives that necessitated the adoption of the only means which I could possibly contrive for your escape. The blessed saints pardon me for having led two females through the asylum of a holy brotherhood! But I have acted under the orders of one who seemed to have full warrant for his actions. Lady, you go to Dumbarton—"

"Ah!" ejaculated Margaret joyfully. "But that one to whom you alluded?" she asked with a tone and look of anxious inquiry.

"I must not name him," rejoined Father Cyrus. "Suffice it for you to know that you evidently possess powerful friends. Ah! I had almost forgotten to bid you abandon yourself in full confidence to those whom you will find in this grove. You may trust them, lady, as you have trusted me; and I have not deceived you! On the contrary, I have brought you to a place of safety. Now give me the disguises which you have both worn."

Margaret and Maude quickly doffed the costumes of the Cistercian Order which had so befriended them; and Father Cyrus, rolling them up into the smallest possible compass, concealed them under his own ecclesiastical gown. Then, without waiting to receive the thanks which Margaret was beginning to pour forth—much less to reply to any of the questions which she would fain have put—he hurried away, and was lost to the view in the mazes of the wood. Margaret was about to inquire of Maude how all this had come about,—when two well-looking young females, neatly and almost elegantly dressed as tirewomen, or the dependants of a lady of rank, issued from the tent. They bestowed a graceful curtsy upon Margaret; and made signs for her and Maude to enter the little pavilion. This they did. Then the tirewomen produced a handsome riding-costume, which they presented to Margaret, showing by signs that she was to put it on. But still they spoke not a word; and Margaret, feeling convinced she was in friendly company, and that some mysterious authority was at the back of all these arrangements that were progressing, considered it not only prudent but likewise as a point of honour to abstain from asking a single question.

The two tirewomen looked at Maude, evidently as if they had not calculated upon her presence, and were indeed somewhat embarrassed by it. Then



they whispered apart for a few moments; and one of them gliding from the tent, quickly disappeared. In a few minutes she returned, bearing with her another female costume, which she made a sign for Maude to put on. It was now evident that Margaret and her young dependant were to be so disguised as to be enabled to pursue their journey unrecognised and in safety; and this conviction dispelled a fleeting momentary uneasiness which she had experienced when observing that Maude's presence had been for an instant a source of embarrassment to the tirowomen. The changes of raiment were quickly effected: and then dark veils were given to both Margaret and Maude, with the ample folds of which they might conceal their faces.

Half-an-hour had thus passed; and still not a single syllable had been spoken in a manner audible to Margaret or Maude,—naught but that brief rapid whispering apart between the two tirowomen. Margaret, continuing faithful to her resolution, broke not the silence: there was a sort of superstitious feeling as if by speaking an untimely word she might dissolve the spell which was the talisman of her safety. And now the tirowomen beckoned them forth from the tent,—which a couple of men, in handsome lacquey-dresses, and who emerged from the shades of the wood, at once proceeded to pull down. The tirowomen led the way through the grove; and in a very few minutes the noise of steeds impatiently pawing the ground, the tones of men's voices, and the clinking sounds which the panoply of armed warriors when moving about sends forth,—all these reached their ears. Margaret was in astonishment as to what it could all mean and whom she might be about to behold: but still she retained that silence which appeared to be a condition of her safety and security as well as of the friendly aid which she was receiving. A few minutes more, and another open space in the grove was reached. There a brilliant spectacle met the eyes, and the voices of the speakers suddenly ceased. Twelve warriors, clad in complete armour of dazzling steel,—all the suits being exactly alike, with the exception of one—stood ready to mount their horses. They were fine tall men: their visors were closed: and ample red scarfs were so arranged in their folded plaits, as entirely to cover the front of their corselets. The one whose armour differed from the rest, was evidently the officer commanding the little squadron; for his panoply was of a richer style—his scarf was of blue and red—and he wore crimson plumes upon his helmet, whereas the casques of the others had each merely a small red tuft. At a short distance from this group, some half-dozen horses were being held by a lacquey dressed like those two who were now making their appearance with the little pavilion compactly folded up; and as one of those steeds served as a sumpter-horse laden with mail-trunks, Margaret and Maude were no longer at a difficulty to conjecture from what source had been procured the second female costume that was furnished while they were yet in the tent. Three of the steeds were provided with saddles for the accommodation of female riders: but one was more exquisitely caparisoned than the other two. Here again it became evident that the presence of Maude had not been foreseen by those who had made all these arrangements; for the richly-caparisoned steed was assigned to Margaret, while the other two were meant for the accommodation of the tirowomen. But the officer quickly indicated a means of conquering the difficulty and providing for the accommodation of the young damsel. The packages were divided amongst his troopers, and the light tent was attached across the crupper of one of the

lacqueys' steeds. Maude was furnished with one of the horses intended for the tirowomen; and the dispossessed female was mounted on the sumpter-horse, which was duly fitted with a large cloth so folded and arranged that it might serve as a saddle. Whatsoever instructions the officer had to give, were issued in whispers, and indeed partly conveyed by signs; and he was obeyed with alacrity.

The cavalcade now moved forward, the officer riding in front,—the females being in the middle, so that Margaret felt it was a veritable escort of safety with which she was provided. But what did it all mean?—what mysterious agency had been at work to effect these intricately ramified and yet perfect arrangements from first to last? She was at a loss to conjecture: nay, more, she was bewildered and confounded. Could the King have relented? could he have thus provided for her accommodation, and in a manner not only handsome, but delicate, seeing that female dependants were provided for her service? A moment she harboured the thought and then rejected it as preposterous, and as contradictory to all antecedent circumstances. For David would not have instructed Father Cyrus to adopt such tortuous means to emancipate her from Dalkeith Castle, when by a single word he might have disarmed the Countess of Morton's hostility and restored Margaret to freedom. Besides Father Cyrus knew the King by sight: he had seen him on the occasion of the combat in the lists at Roslin; and he would not have spoken of him in such vague terms as those which he had addressed to Margaret ere he parted from her in front of the tent. What, therefore, could she think? Her thoughts wandered to the Earl of Bassentyne—to her brother—to Redman—and even to Sir Casimir D'Este: but she could not bring herself to the conclusion that she was indebted for all existing circumstances to either one of those. No!—for if so, why all this mystery?

But it would occupy pages to describe everything which in the shape of wild conjecture and ingenious hypothesis floated through the mind of Margaret, each one to be in succession rejected as inadmissible. We must therefore continue the thread of our narrative, leaving the reader to surmise all that may have occurred unto Margaret's imagination. The cavalcade moved on at an easy pace: the distance from Dalkeith to Dumbarton was about sixty miles; and Margaret was soon enabled to judge, or at least to hope that it was the intention of her escort to reach that place, without a fresh relay of horses, by the evening. Some hours passed, and not a single syllable was spoken; so that at length there was something not merely monotonous, but awful in this silence. Margaret had not even an opportunity of questioning Maude in reference to the circumstances which had thrown her in the way of Father Cyrus; for she dared not break the spell of silence which seemed to sit like a speechless nightmare upon the entire cavalcade. At length there was a halt: the party dismounted from their horses by the side of a stream: the tent was pitched in a few moments—and Margaret was conducted into it by the tirowomen, Maude following closely. Refreshments were furnished; and these were most welcome, for neither Margaret nor the young damsel had as yet broken their fast this day. But now Margaret could keep silence no longer; and she said to one of the tirowomen, "For a long time I have been full of joyous hope and confidence: but the mystery of all these proceedings begins to appal me. It is not mistrust that I feel—it is something—I know not what—perhaps the want to receive from a friendly human voice the assurance that I may still go on hoping and remain lulled in that confidence!"

"Lady," resumed the tirewoman, in a tone of the utmost respect, "you may hope everything for the best, and you may have the fullest confidence. I and my companion are your faithful servitresses: the brave troopers who escort you would perish to a man, sooner than allow a hair of your head to be injured! You are under powerful protection. More I cannot say;—and if we be all enjoined to maintain such a rigorous silence, it is that we may without discourtesy or rudeness abstain from answering any questions or giving any explanations. One word more, and then I have done! You go to Dumbarton, lady, where you will doubtless know everything."

"I am contented!" exclaimed Margaret joyously. "It required but a word to reassure me—you have spoken that word—and I ask no more! I rely implicitly upon the generous friendship by which I am surrounded; and I will not show an ungrateful heart by exhibiting a premature curiosity."

The young tirewoman bowed, as if thankful at thus being considerably relieved from the embarrassing position into which Margaret's questioning was throwing her; and after an adequate interval of rest, the journey was continued. The great county of Lanark was entered—hours passed—the way was still pursued—and then there was another period of refreshment and rest. Again the travel was continued: Glasgow was neared—but it was left some few miles on the left hand; and at length the broad Clyde was reached. It was now late in the afternoon; and no incident had occurred to diminish Margaret's hope, her confidence, or her trust in respect to the sincerity and good faith of her escort. And now, as Dumbarton was neared, several cavalades were seen proceeding in the same direction, and doubtless to the same destination. The officer however, who commanded our little party, so led the way as to keep as much aloof as possible from all those cavalades belonging to great barons and powerful knights—to Scotland's paladins and peers, who were proceeding towards Dumbarton.

But there was one incident which specially struck Margaret, and which we must explain. The little party had just emerged from a grove, and had come in sight of the double-peaked rock on which the Castle of Dumbarton stood, and which Margaret at once recognised from the description she had at some time or another heard or read of it—for it was memorable in Scottish history—when two horsemen, coming from the same direction, overtook the party and galloped past. It immediately struck her that in one of those horsemen she recognised Jassent, Sir Casimir D'Este's faithful squire: but the other individual was unrecognisable, even if she had otherwise known him, for he was muffled in a large dark cloak, notwithstanding the sultriness of that July evening. They were quickly out of sight, proceeding towards Dumbarton; and so quickly had they shot past, that Margaret was not even certain it was really Jassent whom she had thus seen.

The way was continued; and in a short time the towering rock stood out in bolder proportions against the horizon. It rises up from a basis formed by a peninsula at the point of junction of the little river Leven with the broadly sweeping Clyde; and the rock itself, as already stated, presents two heads or peaks to the view, one considerably taller than the other. Upon these summits, and in the gorge between them, the castle stood,—consisting of a number of irregular buildings, protected by strong ramparts. The town of Dumbarton appeared at a distance of about three-quarters of a mile behind the rock itself—that is to say, on its northern side. As our travellers came

from an eastern direction, the refulgence of the setting sun threw out from the western horizon the huge two-headed rock, imparting a greyish tint to the towers and ramparts which frowned above its eminences. In front stretched the majestic Clyde; while northward ran the Leven, meandering amidst some of the most beautiful and picturesque scenery of Dumbartonshire and Stirlingshire. As Margaret contemplated the mighty fortalice, crowning as if with a massive diadem of granite the two-headed colossus which upreared itself above the Clyde, her heart leapt within her bosom; for she thought to herself, "To-morrow the hall of yon castle shall prove the scene of my triumph!"

But whither was the party now bending its way? Was it to the town of Dumbarton? or was it up into the castle itself? Margaret was soon to have this doubt set at rest. To her surprise—to her joy for a moment—and then to the sudden misgiving and sinking of her soul—the officer turned towards the narrow steep ascending pathway which led up into the fortalice. Good heavens! was it all a stratagem on her royal husband's part?—was she to be held as a captive there? The thought as it smote her was agonizing. But the next instant it was dispelled. No! it was impossible! If he had really got her in his power, and if these men were his myrmidons, might he not have sent her to any other fortress—to some far remote castle—where she might be veritably a prisoner, and where there was no chance of her voice being raised to proclaim that she was Scotland's Queen? Besides, all the circumstances of that eventful day,—the unmistakably friendly intervention of Father Cyrus—the arrangements for her flight—the number of the escort, evidently intended to protect her person, but on the other hand so preposterously more than sufficient to prevent her escape—the delicate though mute attentions which she had received—the encouraging words that had been spoken to her, even though so few—and the evidences of a mysterious agency, being at work for her benefit,—all convinced her that she was the victim of no treachery, but that she was being steadily and surely led on, as if by preternatural means, to the consummation of success.

The steep pathway was ascended; and a gate was reached, where sentinels appeared. The party were challenged. Who were they? and whence did they come? This did not look as if they were the myrmidons of the King!—and Margaret's confidence was even still more firmly re-established. The officer commanding the little escort, uttered not a word in reply to the challenge—but produced a paper, which one of the sentinels took into the guard-house. He almost immediately returned, bowing respectfully, and waving his hand for the party to proceed.

Onward the little cavalcade accordingly went the ramparts were reached—another gate was passed through, this time without any challenge—and the interior of the castle was attained. Here the party halted; and the officer, dismounting from his horse, hastened forward by himself towards a neighbouring guard-house—no doubt to make some inquiry. In a few moments he returned, accompanied by a warder carrying a heavy bunch of keys. The officer, now for the first time breaking silence in Margaret's ears throughout that long day, said in a low but respectful tone, "Lady, I have accomplished my task. When you learn by whose orders I have acted, you may report whether myself and my brave men have acquitted ourselves of that task with propriety and attention. The warder will now conduct you to apartments provided for your accommodation; and I respectfully request that you will

observe towards him that same discretion of silence which you have so well maintained this day."

"I thank you, Sir Chief, for your gallant courtesy," answered Margaret; "and rest assured that I shall fail not to repeat these expressions of my gratitude when other occasions may present themselves."

The officer, who had raised his visor—thus revealing the countenance of a well-looking, middle-aged man, but totally unknown to Margaret—assisted her to alight from her horse. Maude and the tirewomen were in readiness to accompany her; and the warder led the way in silence towards the nearest building—while the officer and his troop moved off in another direction. Margaret and her dependants were conducted up a staircase, into a handsomely furnished suite of apartments, where lights were burning—for it was now dusk—and where a table was spread with an inviting repast.

"Do not take it ill, lady," said the warder, "if on issuing hence, I lock the door at the bottom of the staircase leading into the court-yard. It is not intended as an outrage, nor as a sign of captivity—but as a security and as a safeguard."

"Act according to your instructions," replied Margaret, with an amiable look, "from whatsoever source they may come."

The warder bowed and departed: the tirewomen withdrew to an inner chamber; and Margaret now for the first time since the morning, found herself alone with Maude, and evidently free to converse with her beyond all restraint.

CHAPTER XLV.

DUMBARTON CASTLE.

THE moment Margaret and Maude thus found themselves alone together, the young damsel sank upon one knee at the feet of her mistress, whose hand she took and respectfully raised to her lips,—saying, "Allow me, gracious Queen, at length to congratulate your Highness on your escape from Dalkeith Castle!"

"Yes, truly, my dear Maude," replied Margaret, "this is the first moment since the morning that we have been enabled to exchange a syllable together; and during this weary interval of silence a long journey has been accomplished! Setting out from one castle in the morning, we reach another at night; and heaven grant that the star of my fortunes may shine more brightly at Dumbarton than it did at Dalkeith!"

"Can your Highness doubt it?" asked Maude, now placing herself on a footstool at Margaret's feet. "Has not everything progressed most auspiciously this day?—and was not your Grace nobly escorted from Dalkeith to Dumbarton? Finally, is not your Highness lodged here in a befitting style?"

"All this is true, Maude," rejoined Margaret; "and I do indeed regard everything in the most favourable light: I take all these mysterious incidents of to-day as presages of success and triumph for the morrow! But still for the present it is all a mystery most strange—most unaccountable!"

"Then your Grace cannot form the slightest conjecture," said Maude inquiringly, "as to who is the mysterious author of the whole proceedings and arrangements which have characterized this day?"

"Never in all my life, my young friend," replied Margaret, "did I find myself in a position so utterly defying all the possibilities of conjecture! It is rare indeed that a person can be placed in a situation so replete with bewildering uncertainties, or

enviored by circumstances so completely defying the mind's keenest penetration. But everything has flowed too well and too prosperously throughout this day to permit me to dream of fresh treacheries, or to view this last phase of my position under a sinister aspect!"

"May all good angels protect your Grace!" said Maude fervently. "To-morrow will be a great day at Dumbarton—for numerous cavalcades were wending their way hither at the same time as ourselves—"

"Yes," interrupted Margaret, as a thought struck her: "and did it occur to you that as we drew nigh to Dumbarton, you beheld any one whom you recognised?"

"Methought for an instant," said Maude, "that I beheld the squire of the Teutonic Knight."

"And I also!" ejaculated Margaret. "It was on emerging from the grove—"

"And Jassent—if Jassent it really were," resumed Maude, "was accompanied by an individual enveloped in a dark cloak."

"Precisely so!" interjected Margaret: "and now I am assured that it must have been Jassent whom I saw! It is not however at all singular; for I know that Sir Casimir D'Este purposed to be at Dumbarton this day. Yes—and so will my benefactor the Earl of Caithness, and my brother! Perhaps they have already arrived?—perhaps we are even now beneath the same roof?—and peradventure this very wall may be the only separation betwixt myself and them? But while we are thus conversing, Maude, we seem to forget that you had something to explain to me. Tell me therefore, my faithful girl, how was it that you fell in with Father Cyrus this morning at Dalkeith?"

"I will tell your Grace," replied Maude; "and the tale need not be a very long one. Your Highness remembers that when I left your chamber, it was with the promise of setting off immediately to Roslin Castle and procuring the assistance of armed men to effect your liberation. I was determined to avoid the Countess of Morton and my companion Minnie, if possible, so that I might not be questioned any further concerning your Grace; for I feared lest my countenance should betray that I was no longer so sincerely devoted to Louisa of Morton as I used to be. I glided down the staircase—traversed the court-yard—and reached the outer gate. There I beheld the two grim men-at-arms mounting guard. Affecting to be simply strolling forth to breathe the fresh air, I stopped and said to the men in a tone of light merriment, 'So ye have found an occupation at Dalkeith?'—'As well there as elsewhere,' was the reply sulkily grunted out by one of the men.—'But for what earthly purpose are you mounting guard?' I inquired. 'It can scarcely be to prevent any one inside the castle from going out; and it assuredly cannot be to prevent the townspeople from coming in; for I have heard that according to the royal charter the gates must stand open from sunrise to sunset, so that the worthy burghers of Dalkeith and their families may have every fitting opportunity of attending holy worship in the oratory.'—'We have no purpose to keep back the townspeople,' replied one of the two men; 'but we have received special mandates to prevent the egress of Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan.'—It was thus the grim warrior spoke, dear lady," added Maude; "and therefore your Grace perceives plainly enough that those men knew not for what purpose they were stationed there to deprive you of your liberty; they were utterly ignorant that it was Scotland's Queen whom they spoke of as plain Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan!"

"Of a surety," said Margaret, "if the Countess of Morton did not reveal my secret to Minnie and yourself, she was still less likely to whisper it in the ears of those two grim followers of her's. They were prepared to obey her blindly—and that was sufficient. But proceed with your explanations. What followed?"

"I strolled forth from the castle," continued Maude; "and as I reflected upon what the man-at-arms had been saying to me, I involuntarily ejaculated, 'Well, mount guard, then! and keep vigilant watch if ye will! but little do ye suspect that I go to Roslin for succour!'—Scarcely had these words burst from my lips in unconscious exclamation, when as I turned the angle of the building, I found myself face to face with a holy monk. I stopped short, very much frightened; for I thought that in my unguardedness of mood I had betrayed myself.—'Daughter,' he said, 'you speak of speeding to Roslin to fetch succour: who is it that stands in need of succour within the walls of Dalkeith?'—I trembled very much; I have no doubt I looked very pale, for I was sorely frightened; but my fears were soon relieved, when the holy father said in a most benevolent tone, 'Fear not to confide in me, daughter; for I would rather assist you if your aim be a good one, than in any way oppose it. Besides,' he continued—and methought that his look became strangely significant, as if he penetrated my purpose, 'it may be that you need not go quite so far as to Roslin for the succour which you require.'—'Ah! holy father! I ejaculated, clasping my hands, 'if you will take pity upon an innocent and excellent lady who for some reason is oppressed and persecuted, heaven will reward you!'—The monk looked around to convince himself that we were alike unobserved and unheard; and when he had satisfied himself on these points, he fixed his eyes earnestly upon my countenance, saying, 'Whom do you serve within those walls? Are you not attached to the suite of the Countess of Morton?'—'Those in whose service we may appear to be, we do not always faithfully serve,' I replied, guardedly; 'and those to whom we are assigned in order that we may betray them, we may resolve to serve with the fullest sincerity.'—'Which means,' rejoined the priest, 'that you belong to the suite of the Countess of Morton, but that you no longer love her service; and that though you have been assigned by her ladyship to the temporary service of another for the purpose of betraying this other, you are nevertheless resolved to serve her faithfully.'—I nodded an affirmative.—'And the lady to whose service you have been assigned,' said the priest, 'is Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan?'—'The same,' I responded.—'And wherefore,' he added, 'do you require succour on her behalf? Fear not to speak, for I will most cheerfully assist her; and to prove to you my sincerity, I will add that I was at the very moment thinking how I could best communicate with Mistress Margaret, when I met you.'—An ejaculation of surprise burst from my lips; and then for a moment I was struck by a misgiving—a suspicion that the priest meant some treachery and was endeavouring to elicit from my lips all such information as would suit his own purposes—"

"Poor Maude, you were frightened!" interjected Margaret; "and doubtless for the moment you gave up everything as lost?"

"Yes—for the moment, gracious lady, my heart completely sank within me," responded the damsel. "But only conceive how great was my astonishment, and how infit the relief which my mind experienced, when the monk went on to say, 'I am a stanch and firm friend! Have faith in me! I see that you know not how to act, daughter; and peradventure you may have seen treacheries only

too well calculated to fill your mind with suspicion. But you will have confidence in me when I assure you that I am no stranger to Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan, and that I have even received special orders to watch over her safety. I know likewise that it behoves her to be at Dumbarton this day or to-morrow; and if need be I am prepared to clear away all difficulties that beset her path.'—Your Highness may well suppose that I was overwhelmed with joy at this assurance: the holy father lifted his crucifix to his lips, at the same time breathing these words, 'Heaven is my witness that I am incapable of harming a single hair of Margaret Fitz-Allan's head!'—I then no longer doubted his sincerity for a single moment: I felt as confident of his good faith as I was certain of my own! He asked me to explain the precise reason for which I had first thought of proceeding to Roslin. I answered that you were a prisoner in Dalkeith Castle, and that you were indeed most anxious to repair without delay to Dumbarton. Then he bade me return to you, lady, and induce you to enter the adjoining monastery. He informed me that he himself did not belong to that monastery, but that he was a monk of Melrose temporarily sojourning with the holy fathers of St. John. He moreover stated that there were five or six of his Cistercian brethren staying with him at the Dalkeith monastery; and that while they were in their cells he would procure a couple of their costumes to serve as disguises to take your Grace and me through the holy establishment. Full of faith in the statements he made and the promises he held out, I returned to your Majesty; and the result proved that I erred not in reposing so much trust in the good friar. I have now explained all I know to your Highness:—but whether these details will assist your Grace in forming a conjecture as to the source of all those arrangements which have brought us in safety to Dumbarton, I have yet to learn!"

"The narrative you have given me, Maude," answered Margaret, "has only increased my bewilderment, without in the slightest degree assisting me towards the solution of the mystery. Father Cyrus—for that is the name of the good monk—evidently knew that it was my object to reach Dumbarton. But who could have told him?"

"Evidently the personage," interjected Maude, "whosoever he may be, that remains in the background, and to whom must be ascribed the authorship of all these arrangements—"

"Yes!" exclaimed Margaret: "there can be no doubt that there is some personage in the background who has accomplished all this and who is befriending me! But who can he be?"

"Think, gracious lady," said Maude, "and strive to make out a list in your mind of all the persons who by any possibility *could* happen to know that it suited your interests to come to Dumbarton."

"That list is soon made out," ejaculated Margaret. "In the first place there was the King; and I think that not for a moment must I dare flatter myself with the belief that it was he who, repentant and remorseful, has done all this which is now exciting our wonder! No, it cannot be!" and Margaret shook her head mournfully. "Then there was the Countess of Morton—"

"But she is out of the question," ejaculated Maude, "in reference to the authorship of those arrangements which were from first to last so friendly and so successful! Who stands next on the list?"

"There must now be a grouping together of several names," rejoined Margaret. "My brother—Sir Casimir D'Este—and the Earl of Bassentyne—these were present in the chapel when I proclaimed my resolve to be at Dumbarton to-morrow.

Then, on their return to Roslin, they of course communicated that intention on my part to the Earl of Caithness and the Lady Albertina:—and who knows but that the rumour may have travelled even still further—so that throughout the entire castle of Roslin it may have been whispered—and thus Hepburn—Redman—every one, in short, within those walls—”

“And of all the names whom your Grace has enumerated,” inquired Maude, “is there not one on whom your thoughts might settle as that of an individual having your best interests at heart—seeking an opportunity to prove his friendship—having perhaps had reason to suspect that treacheries would surround you and that you would stand in need of succour—”

“Enough, Maude!” interrupted Margaret; “it is useless to give way to conjecture! The morrow will doubtless reveal everything. I am wearied, and will now retire to rest.”

Maude summoned the tirowomen: Margaret was conducted into the well furnished bed-chamber prepared for her reception, and where everything was found requisite for the toilet of a lady who had been well and tenderly brought up. At the foot of the couch a little bed was arranged by the tirowomen for the use of Maude, so that the youthful dependant might not be separated from her mistress. When Margaret’s night-toilet was accomplished, the tirowomen—who still retained the seal of strictest silence upon their lips—withdrew to an ante-chamber where they themselves were to pass the night; and Margaret again found herself alone with Maude. But not choosing to renew the discourse which she had somewhat curiously interrupted in the sitting-apartment, Margaret affected to be sleepy: she therefore bade Maude “Good night”—and silence reigned in the chamber.

And why did Margaret experience a disinclination to resume that topic? Because, as she mentally surveyed the images which she had conjured up when enumerating the list of names, that of the Earl of Bassentyne seemed to stand out more conspicuously than the rest. We do not mean that Margaret contemplated it with any tenderness of feeling: but what we are seeking to explain is that his image began to connect itself more than any other in her mind with the entire proceedings of that memorable day. Could it be the Earl of Bassentyne who with a keen prescience had anticipated her position, and with noblest generosity had furnished the means of enabling her to baffle all treachery and reach Dumbarton? If it were really he, could it not be understood why with so much delicate consideration he was keeping himself in the background? In short, who but he *could* possibly have a motive for enveloping the whole proceeding in so much mystery? Then, as to the treatment she was now experiencing at Dumbarton, and the preparations which had been made for her reception,—might not all this be ascribed to some powerful influence which Roland of Bassentyne probably possessed with the authorities of the castle?

Such were the questions which Margaret was now asking herself: such was the theory which in her mind she was revolving. No wonder, therefore, that she felt unwilling to pursue the topic with Maude; for she could not to that young damsel reveal the reasons why she fancied that she had at length obtained a glimmering insight into the depths of the mystery, and that her thoughts were settling themselves on Roland of Bassentyne. She almost hoped that her hypothesis would turn out to be correct, for she said to herself, “If all this be indeed the work of Roland, it will fully prove that, on his generous friendship I may rely for completeness,

secrecy in respect to the love-vows which we exchanged together ere I became aware that there was a chance of winning a monarch’s smiles and placing a diadem upon my brow!”

In the midst of her meditations Margaret felt slumber stealing upon her: and she abandoned herself to it. Her dreams borrowed their complexion from the incidents of the day, as well as from the latest thoughts that were floating in her mind when the influence of the drowsy god began to make itself felt. Thus she beheld the image of Father Cyrus guiding her through the semi-obscure corridors of the monastery—then the stalwart forms of the dozen steel-clad warriors who had served as her silent escort—then the beautiful Maude kneeling at her feet; and then she fancied that Roland or Bassentyne was bending a soft melancholy look upon her,—a look which seemed to imply his knowledge that he dared love no longer, but that he cherished a sentiment of the sincerest friendship in place of that other feeling which he might no more entertain!

Margaret awoke at an early hour; for the sounds of bustle and activity throughout the castle penetrated into the suite of apartments which she occupied. Trumpets and clarions were sounding the martial reveille: the trampling of steeds upon the pavement of the court—the measured tread of marching companies of foot soldiers—the clamouring voices of the hostlers, grooms, and pages—the clattering of martial weapons—and the neighing of horses—all mingled in loud discord so as to arouse the sleepers from their slumbers. The tirowomen entered Margaret’s chamber, bearing with them a box, from which they took a rich and elegant costume, befitting any lady of the highest rank, and characterized by as much tasteful elegance as costliness. From the same box a casket was produced; and this was found to contain several jewels which must have been purchased at no mean price. Margaret gazed with an astonishment that was only subdued by that natural dignity which belonged to her, and which was necessarily associated with the faculty of maintaining an outward appearance of calm self-possession. Maude contemplated the rich dress and the brilliant gems with an almost childish delight blended with a look of superstitious wonderment, as if she half fancied that she was in fairyland, the marvels of which fabled clime were developing themselves around her. The tirowomen still remained perfectly silent: but their countenances were not altogether so meaningless in their expression as their language was mute: they were evidently gratified at being enabled to present these costly objects to Margaret—while smiles for an instant played upon their lips as they beheld the almost infantile delight of Maude.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE AUDIENCE HALL.

SLOWLY a shade came over the features of Margaret. To whom was she indebted for these elegancies of the toilet?—at whose cost was she expected to embellish herself in that sumptuous robe—with those brilliant gems? It was one thing to provide her with an escort from a place of danger to a place of safety; and even if such a proceeding had cost an entire fortune, it was a boon which a lady might in all delicacy and propriety receive from one of the opposite sex in that age of chivalrous courtesy. Yes—even though it were the Earl of Bassentyne himself, to whom she plighted her love before she accepted the suit of the King,—and even if there

were the sure prospect before her that the tale of her love-pledging to Roland should be blazoned forth to the whole world,—yet from his hands, as from those of an earl, a knight, and a gentleman, might she have accepted all which up to this moment she had experienced in the shape of boon and favour since the yester-morn. But now a point was reached at which she must pause, for another forward step taken might involve her in embarrassment:—she hesitated to dress herself in the robes and embellish herself with the diamonds which were displayed before her.

Maude looked up anxiously into Margaret's countenance as that cloud came gradually over it; and the young maiden was bewildered—for girl-like she only saw a beautiful costume and brilliant gems which she would not have hesitated under similar circumstances to assume without thinking much about the source whence they might have emanated: she did not comprehend either the haughty pride or the exceeding wariness of Margaret's character. The tirewomen on the other hand seemed at once to fathom what was passing in Margaret's thoughts, and even to be prepared for this emergency which was now arising. For they exchanged a rapid and significant glance; and then one of them breaking silence, said, "Lady, in the case which presents itself I am permitted to speak. Your delicacy was foreseen. Receive therefore the assurance that you may in all honour accept the gifts which are offered you in that pure and sacred spirit of honourable feeling and of friendship which has dictated the whole treatment you have experienced since yesterday morning. Indeed, you may now be permitted to ask any reasonable question: but at the same time I am limited by the strongest injunctions to the range of answers that I may give."

"Ah! 'tis well that I may question you!" exclaimed Margaret. "Tell me therefore, damsel, do you rightly know who I am?"

"I know nothing, lady," was the response, "beyond the fact that my companion and myself are to serve you respectfully; while I can assure you that we are inclined to minister unto you devotedly."

"Ah!" thought Margaret to herself, "then they know not that I am the Queen!—or else the reply of this maiden is given most guardedly! But I will see!"—Then speaking audibly, she said, "This robe and these jewels are fitted for one of the loftiest rank. A King only is accustomed to bestow such gifts! Is it the King of Scotland who has sent these which He befores me?"

"That question may I answer, lady," responded the tirewoman; "and I reply," she added emphatically, "it was not the King who sent those gifts."

"Then answer me yet another question," said Margaret—but she hesitated for an instant how to shape her query: she chose not to mention the name of Bassentyne; and therefore at length she said, "Was it one bearing an Earl's rank who sent these gifts?"—for she thought that if the question should really fail to excite any suspicion in respect to Roland, it might naturally be supposed she was alluding to the Earl of Orkness, and as a matter of course there was no harm in her accepting such costly articles from one who had been as a father unto her.

"Lady," replied the tirewoman, "it was not one bearing an Earl's rank who sent these gifts. But now I must say no more—unless it be to entreat that you will hesitate not to make use of the gifts; for you may judge whether the proofs of friendship hitherto manifested are likely to lead to a treachery or a snare. And now I am silent!"

Margaret was still uncertain how to act: yet her

idea that she was indebted to the Earl of Bassentyne for everything that had occurred since the yesterday's morn, had been suddenly dissipated. Who could her mysterious friend be? She was more than ever bewildered. She would fain have put additional questions—she longed to run successively through the whole category of names enumerated by her on the preceding evening when in discourse with Maude: but she saw that it would be useless, for that the damsel who had acted as spokeswoman had again placed an hermetical seal upon her lips.

She accordingly made a sign that the damsels might apparel her in the rich costume, and might decorate her with the gems,—a decision which conjured up an unmistakable expression of innocent joy upon their countenances: while Maude literally clapped her hands with childish delight.

By the time Margaret's toilet was accomplished,—and gloriously handsome did she appear in the costume provided for her,—an elegant repast was spread in the sitting-room by some of the castle servitors, who were escorted thither by the warder having charge of that particular building. But slight was the justice which Margaret did to the meal; and few were the morsels of food which passed her lips; for her heart was palpitating with suspense—and despite all the natural strength of her mind, the strongest chords of that heart were vibrating with anxiety, for she felt that she stood on the threshold of great and important events. Scarcely had she risen from the table when the door opened, and the warder re-appeared, introducing that officer who had commanded the escort on the preceding day. He was arrayed in his shining panoply of steel: his scarf was again folded thickly over his corselet: his visor was raised through respect for the lady. He bowed with a profound courtesy, and said, "Lady, have the kindness to follow me."

The tirewomen now adjusted over Margaret's head a veil, which they so folded in front of her face as to prevent even the most searching eye from obtaining a glimpse of that royally handsome countenance; while Maude was likewise directed to put on a veil whereby she might similarly disguise herself. We should observe that a neat and elegant apparel had been furnished for the use of the young damsel, and that the tirewomen themselves were dressed as became the dependants of a lady of the highest rank. All these circumstances—added to the fact of the handsome costume supplied for her own use—naturally impressed Margaret with the idea that she was being placed in a position to assert her rights as the Scottish Queen; so that she ejaculated within herself, "Of a surety, the mysterious author of all these bounties must know for what purpose I come to Dumbarton, and must be affording me every assistance to assume my proper position in a becoming manner!"

She now intimated with a graceful inclination of her veiled head her readiness to follow the officer. He bowed, and led the way into the corridor, closing his visor at the same time. Margaret was immediately behind him, attended by Maude and the two tirewomen. The warder was already at the extremity of the passage, where he had opened the door; and he bowed respectfully as Margaret passed. Her bosom swelled with mingled exultation and suspense at the various indications of an almost devious homage with which she found herself greeted; and accepting them as good auguries, she mentally ejaculated, "Truly, I shall be this day hailed as Scotland's Queen!"

The officer led the way along a second passage, at the extremity of which another warder appeared at

a door already opened. He likewise bowed respectfully; and the little party passed on. A wide landing at the summit of a grand staircase was now reached; and there several of the royal pages were lounging about. They gazed upon the little party that was passing with that degree of curiosity and astonishment which convinced Margaret that they were ignorant of what meant the spectacle before their eyes; for she could see through the folds of her veil, though her own countenance was not to be discerned. On the other side of the landing were large folding-doors, which were closed; and thereat stood two pages carrying silver wands. One of them, addressing the officer, inquired, "Whose party is it that is to be introduced?"

The officer made no verbal reply, but indicated a little side door; and at the same time he produced a paper which he gave the page. The page glanced at the paper—his manner immediately became all respectful—and drawing forth a small key, he opened that little side door. An ascent of steps was revealed: but instead of mounting them, the officer stood aside, and bowed to Margaret in a way to signify that it was she who was to advance. This she did, followed by Maude and the two tirewomen: the half-dozen steps were ascended—the door was closed and locked behind the lady and her dependants.

They found themselves in a species of screened gallery at the extremity of a spacious hall. The gallery was richly furnished with seats; and the lattice-work in front concealed the party from the view of those in the hall—while it enabled them to behold everything with the most perfect clearness. On a dais at the farther extremity of the hall, sat the King, superbly apparelled. Behind him and on either side were attendants and guards. A little on the right of the dais was a seat, evidently placed there for the accommodation of a nobleman, who had however risen and was leaning upon it,—his whole attitude and demeanour expressing mingled scorn and defiance for the proceedings which had already commenced. This nobleman, who was superbly attired in court costume, was immediately recognised by Margaret to be the Black Douglas. And a little way in front of the dais, stood the fine tall handsome form of a lady, whose elegant apparel set off her admirable shape in all the advantage of its faultless contours. The proceedings, as we have said, had already commenced; and as the lady was denouncing the Earl of Douglas as the author of cruel wrongs which she had sustained, Margaret had no trouble in conjecturing that this was Elvira Ramsay, the complainant in the present trial.

And now Margaret's eyes wandered anxiously around the hall. There were galleries on either side; and these were filled with nobles and ladies of the highest rank. Foremost amongst the former Margaret perceived her benefactor the Earl of Caithness,—who, though listening with evident attention to the Lady Elvira's speech, yet could not altogether conceal a certain uneasiness and restlessness of manner, as if he were expecting the appearance of some one else upon the scene, or as if he knew that matters of even still greater importance, at least so far as his own feelings were concerned, must presently arise.

"He is thinking of me—the worthy nobleman!" said Margaret to herself. "And, Oh! it is with joy that he shall embrace me ere the day be done!"

Underneath the galleries there were crowds of the principal retainers of the great nobles whom the present solemn trial had congregated at Dumbarton: but Margaret looked vainly around in every direction in search of her brother: she could

not see him. Neither was Albertina there: nor could she behold the Earl of Bassentyne—nor yet Sir Casimir D'Este. Ah! but there was standing room underneath the little gallery which she and her dependants occupied, and perhaps they might be there, concealed from the range of her vision? It was thus she thought within herself; and then, as she again glanced around the spacious hall and upon the brilliant company, she wondered whether the moment was far distant when she should have an opportunity of revealing herself to the universal gaze—proclaiming that she was Scotland's Queen—and receiving the homage of the great throng of paladins, peeresses, and courtiers!

But we must now quit the audience-hall for a time, and introduce the reader to another part of the castle. This was the outer court-yard, close by the upper gate at the top of the ascending pathway. There two young men, arrayed in complete armour, with waving plumes above their heads, were pacing slowly to and fro,—sufficiently near to the gate to keep their eyes upon all persons entering the castle, but still at a sufficient distance to enable them to converse without being overheard by the sentinels and the numerous pages, lacqueys, men-at-arms, and grooms who were loitering in that vicinage. The two young men to whom we have just referred, were the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan.

"Margaret does not make her appearance!" ejaculated Fitz-Allan impatiently, as he thus interrupted a narrative which Roland of Bassentyne was giving to him. "But we will wait here yet awhile, my dear friend; for the orders and regulations are so rigid, with sign and countersign, it is possible that she may experience some difficulty in making her entry. Yet Seton is at the lower gate—"

"Is it not strange, too," inquired the Earl, "that we should have as yet seen nothing of Sir Casimir D'Este?"

"Yes—it is strange," replied Fleming; "for he assured us that he would be here. Proceed however with your narrative; and pardon me for interrupting it. At any other moment, my dear Roland, it would prove of paramount interest with me: but tortured and full of suspense as I now am—"

"I will not inflict it on you," said the young Earl: "but as we did not meet until this morning since our separation at Dalkeith the day before yesterday—"

"True! there has been no opportunity," observed Fleming, "for you to describe all the infamy of the treatment which you sustained. I beseech you to proceed. Believe me, it is no infliction;—and moreover, as you wish my advice in respect to the precise manner in which you shall proclaim your grievances to the King, I pray you to continue. You had just reached the point when on landing from the vessel at the entrance to the castle of the Bass Rock, you and your followers were seized upon—you were overpowered and disarmed—"

"And worse!" resumed the Earl of Bassentyne: "I was plundered of all I possessed about my person at the moment,—my purse—my jewels—even the very rings from my fingers! And amongst those rings, Fleming," he continued in a tremulous voice, "was one which I highly valued—indeed I estimated it above all price—for it was the pledge of love—"

"Alas, my friend Roland! I pity you!" said Fitz-Allan. "But I never knew until now that your heart had been engaged—"

"We will not speak upon that subject," inter-



rupted Bassentyne hastily. "It is a dream that is dissolved—and perhaps you will never hear more of it."

"Was the fair one a traitress to her vows? or did she die?" asked Fleming, in a low tone of friendly sympathy.

"I must consider that she is dead to me," responded Roland. "But listen to my tale. Having been plundered as well as disarmed, I was conducted up a narrow ascent of steps into the fortalice, and there consigned to an apartment in the Donjon. It was furnished with tolerable decency; and I soon found that although a prisoner, I was not to be treated with any unnecessary severity. I was however separated altogether from my domestics, and two of the castle servitors were appointed to attend upon me."

"And were you not informed for what reason you were imprisoned?" inquired Fitz-Allan indignantly.

"Not the slightest intelligence could I obtain upon that point," replied Roland. "For the first three weeks of my captivity I only saw the two servitors appointed to attend upon me,—unless it were the sentinels in the court-yard below or on the opposite rampart. Those servitors were men of naturally sullen and morose dispositions: they often remained silent when I addressed them—or if they spoke, it was to growl out the assurance that they were as ignorant as I myself of the motive of my captivity. At length I demanded an interview with Sir John Galbraith, the governor of the castle. It was granted; and this was at the expiration of the three weeks during which I had spoken to none but my two servitors. I must confess that I was somewhat elated with hope at the readiness with which my request for an interview was accorded by Sir John Galbraith. I was conducted to his apartment,—where I found him with his wife and daughter. He is an elderly man—at least sixty years of age: his wife is a fine handsome woman of about forty; his daughter is a superb creature of nineteen or twenty. I was received with sufficient courtesy: but when I entered upon the business for which the interview was demanded, Sir John Galbraith at once assured me that it was out of his power to give me any information in respect to the cause of my captivity, or even to intimate how long it was likely to last. I knew that threats were useless: I saw that it was equally vain to condescend to entreaties, which would only prove humiliating to myself without the slightest chance of producing a beneficial effect. Lady Galbraith surveyed me with a species of reserved courtesy: while her daughter Marion—though seeming to hang over her embroidery—flung furtive looks which I fancied to be replete with a compassionate interest. The interview only lasted ten minutes—"

"Did you not demand of Sir John Galbraith," inquired Fleming, "why you were plundered as well as disarmed and made prisoner?"

"I did," responded the Earl. "Sir John's cheeks flushed for a moment when I mentioned that identical word, *plundered*; and then he coldly said that all prisoners must reckon upon being deprived of the means of bribing persons to assist in their escape. The interview terminated; and I was conducted back to my apartment. And now, my dear Fleming, I am about to enter upon a portion of my narrative which is so full of wild romance and thrilling interest—"

"Ah, there are persons arriving!" suddenly ejaculated Fitz-Allan, as the gate of the castle was now thrown open. "By St. Andrew! another disappointment," he added, in a gloomy tone, as he beheld some half-dozen cavaliers ride into the court-

yard. "Proceed, my dear Roland—and again pardon me for the interruption."

The Earl of Bassentyne sighed, but it was inaudible. He likewise was full of suspense to behold the appearance of Margaret,—neither himself nor her brother entertaining the remotest suspicion that she had been since the preceding night within the precincts of the castle.

There was a brief pause: and then the young Earl resumed his narrative in the terms which will be found in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE EARL'S NARRATIVE.

"WHEN I was again in my own apartment, after my interview with Sir John Galbraith," said the Earl of Bassentyne, in pursuance of his narrative, "I confess that I was ready to give myself up to despair; for it was a frightful thing to reflect that I was imprisoned in that sea-girt castle—chained as it were to, that horrible rock—without having the slightest consciousness of the offence which I had committed, and therefore being utterly unable to estimate how long my captivity was likely to endure. For my life I certainly had no fears; because I thought that if this were threatened, the blow would have been struck at once when I was first seized upon and so treacherously rendered a captive there, and it would have been needless to suffer me to live even that space of three weeks. But although I did not entertain any apprehension that my existence was menaced, yet it was sufficiently fearful to contemplate the fact that I was a prisoner there, at the will of some mysterious power, and that this captivity might last as long as the error or the caprice, whichever it were, that had rendered me its victim. And sometimes, when I looked across the water and beheld the grim towers of Tantallon frowning on the opposite promontory, I wondered whether the agency of the Black Douglas had been at work to persecute me, and whether it were possible that Sir John Galbraith might be a friend or creature of that nobleman. But then, as I again reflected, I could not very well admit the possibility of this theory; for it was scarcely likely that Stephen Cochrane, the King's Page, would lend himself to any of the designs of the Earl of Douglas after having acted in his capacity of pursuivant so completely against the interests of that nobleman at Hermitage Castle. Besides, I likewise reflected that if I had been captured at the instigation of the Black Douglas, I should doubtless at that moment have been looking forth from behind the barred windows of Tantallon itself, and not from an iron-defended casement of the Bass fortalice. Frequently, as you may suppose, my thoughts reverted to the King; and I wondered whether he could for any possible reason have thus deprived me of my liberty. But no!—I could scarcely settle my mind to such a conclusion; for I knew that I had done nothing to offend his Majesty—and moreover that if the contrary were the case, David would not have hesitated to order me under watch and ward without taking so circuitous a course to ensnare and entrap me. But then still came back the constant question—'How was it that Stephen Cochrane, one of the royal retainers, should be the author of the plot? and how had he dared use the King's name to entice me on board the vessel under pretence of despatching me on a secret mission of an important and honourable character?'—As for Sir John Galbraith himself, I conceived that it was totally impossible he could be the principal actor in

the mysterious drama in which I was playing a part alike so painful and unaccountable: for against him I could not have offended—I had never in my life seen him until the occasion of the interview which I had demanded."

"Is the Castle of the Bass Rock Sir John Galbraith's own feudal dwelling?" inquired Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan; "or does he hold it on behalf of some other chieftain?"

"The circumstances by which Sir John Galbraith holds the Bass Rock," responded the Earl of Bassentyne, "afforded not the slightest clue to the reading of the mystery. The heritage of that castle and rock is now a matter of dispute between a couple of noble families; and the principal scion of each family is a minor. They are both mere boys; and therefore against them had I given no offence—nor if I had, would they have possessed the power to decree my consignment to that tortalice; for Sir John Galbraith admits the claim or neither to its possession. Those claims are the subject of litigation; and while the suit is pending, Sir John has been appointed to the government of the little insular rock, in order that so important a fortress, serving as the maritime key to Scotland's capital itself, may not be without the proper means of defence. He was not even appointed by the King, but was nominated by the municipality of Edinburgh, to whom the choice of a governor was left by the litigating families, and with the consent of the supreme judges who have taken legal cognizance of the case. Thus, you perceive, my dear Fleming, that the longer I reflected upon all these circumstances in the hope of being enabled to find a clue to the mystery of my prisonage, the more completely was I perplexed—the more painfully was I bewildered!"

"I can understand what must have been the state of your mind, my dear Roland," answered Fitz-Allan; "and deeply do I sympathize with you! It must have been as bewildering to you as the circumstances which within the last three days have environed my sister Margaret are perplexing to me. She does not come!" ejaculated the young Knight impatiently, as he flung his looks towards the gate for about the thousandth time within the hour that was then passing. "But proceed, Roland: I am anxious to learn the circumstances of your escape."

"I will not dwell any longer," proceeded the Earl of Bassentyne, "upon the thoughts which perplexed me; but I will hasten and bring my narrative to a conclusion. While I was thinking of the Galbraith family, the idea gradually stole into my mind that I had seen Marion, the Knight's daughter, at some previous period—though, as I have already said, I had never to my knowledge met her father until the occasion of the interview that had been accorded me. But where had I seen Marion before? At length I recollected that some four or five years ago I was staying at the Highland castle of the Earl of Strathmore, and that she was a guest of the Countess at the same time. I had forgotten her until this occasion when we again met under circumstances so different. And no wonder that I should have failed immediately to recollect Marion Galbraith; for when at Strathmore she was a young, timid, shrinking girl—whereas now she had expanded into all the superb beauty of a precocious womanhood. Ah! as I thus gathered my recollections, I ceased to be surprised that she should have regarded me so attentively, yet furtively, while I was in the presence of her parents. And in those regards there had appeared to be a certain degree of sympathy; and then I asked myself whether I dared hope that this feeling would lead her to take

compassion upon me? and if so, whether she had the power to render me any assistance towards an escape? Oh! but no sooner had the idea of escape sprung up in my brain, when it instantaneously yielded to a sickening sensation of disappointment: for how was it possible to escape from that rock in the midst of the sea? I had just arrived at this painful point in my reflections, when one of my sullen-looking servitors entered my apartment to bring me my usual afternoon repast. As he spread the table, he fixed his eyes upon me with a certain degree of significance, and said, 'Your lordship does not appear to be at all strict in respect to your devotions?'—At first I thought the man meant to convey some insult; and I was about to rebuke him accordingly, when it struck me, from the continued significance of his look that there might be some hidden meaning and purpose in the observation. I therefore spoke kindly, as I demanded what he meant.—'Beshrew me, my lord,' he said, 'but if I were in your place, I would not have been three whole weeks a prisoner here, without requesting permission to visit the castle-chapel occasionally. It would be at least a change from this dreary solitude, even if your lordship had no inclination for prayer.'—I waited in expectation that the man would say something more; but he remained silent. Convinced however that he had an ulterior object in view, I said that I should certainly be well pleased to enjoy the privilege of visiting the chapel.—'Does your lordship charge me,' he asked, 'to bear such a message to Sir John Galbraith?'—I at once answered in the affirmative: a barely perceptible grin of significance appeared on the fellow's coarse lips for a moment; and he left the apartment, shooting the huge bolts into their sockets as usual. He was absent about half-an-hour, during which time I was a prey to the utmost suspense. The thought floated in my mind—though I scarcely dared entertain the hope—that it implied that a generous woman's wit was already at work on my behalf: and who could this woman be unless it were Marion Galbraith? At length the man returned, with an intimation that I was at liberty to visit the chapel for an hour every morning at eight and every evening at six.—'Then,' I said, 'this evening at six will I avail myself of that license.'—The man again retired. Slowly and anxiously passed the hours, until at length the one approached which according to a presentiment that was in my mind, I felt assured would have some influence on my present fortunes.—'Margaret does not come!' said the young Earl, thus interrupting the thread of his narrative, as he noticed that Fitz-Allan's eyes were again turned towards the gate.

"No! It is unaccountable!" ejaculated Sir Fleming. "But still we will wait! It is yet early in the forenoon; and there are many long hours yet until the evening. Proceed, Roland. Let us suppose the instant to have arrived when you were to visit the chapel of the Bass Rock Castle."

"That instant came," continued the Earl of Bassentyne; "and my two servitors entered the apartment. They bade me follow them; and they both seemed to have a significant expression of countenance; so that I perceived that whatever secret might be known to the one must be equally known to the other. They led me along two or three passages,—then down a staircase—and we at last entered the chapel. It is a somewhat large and gloomy building, situated on the ground-floor. They retired, bolting the huge door behind them. Then, as I looked around me, wondering for what purpose I could have been brought thither, I beheld a side door open, and a lady came forward. The idea of Marion naturally flashed to my mind in a moment.

Conceive, therefore, my astonishment when as the female advanced from the obscurity which prevailed in that part of the chapel, I recognised Lady Galbraith!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Sir Fleming, "the plot is thickening! Am I now to learn that her ladyship had fallen in love with you—or that she was moved with more compassion than her beautiful daughter had entertained on your behalf?"

"Lady Galbraith had indeed conceived a sudden and violent passion for me," replied the Earl. "I will not weary you with details of the language in which she avowed the guilty flame; but you will believe me, Fleming, when I assure you that I repelled her advances firmly, and even indignantly. I assured her that sweet though liberty were, I was incapable of purchasing it at the price at which it seemed to be offered: for it *was* my liberty which she proffered on condition that she might become the companion of my flight. I have already told you that she is a woman of about forty years of age—superbly handsome—of a commanding and queen-like presence; and not a single whitening thread streaks the dark glory of her luxuriant raven hair. Never did I behold so humiliating a spectacle as that woman then presented to the view! She wept—she asked me if I treated her love with scorn: then she strove to summon all her pride to her aid—but she could not: the feelings of the woman were the stronger! She wept and entreated again: she declared that she detested her husband, who had long been hateful to her—and that she would adopt any course to be enabled to separate herself from his odious society. She said that when I was in his presence I had made so strong an impression on her that she was resolved to save me; but that she had treated me with a certain cold reserve in order that he might not have the slightest opportunity of fathoming what was passing in her thoughts. This interview with Lady Galbraith lasted an hour, during which she humbled herself at my very feet: but I refused to speak the word which would have given me liberty at the cost of a vile dishonourable action."

"Admirable Roland!" exclaimed Fitz-Allan, whose nobly handsome countenance seemed to express that he would have acted in a manner precisely similar.

"At the expiration of that hour," continued the Earl of Bassentyne, "the two men re-entered the chapel; and Lady Galbraith hastily murmured, 'Think over it yet awhile; and I will meet you here to-morrow morning!'—Before I could breathe the negative which I was firmly bent on giving, she disappeared through the side door that had originally given her admission into the chapel. The men—now with a clearly perceptible grin of significance upon their countenances—conducted me back to my apartment: but I spoke not a word. On the following morning they came punctually at eight o'clock, to offer to conduct me to the chapel: but I refused to accompany them. They looked astonished, and exchanged glances of perfect amazement. Hours passed—and as evening approached, one of the men came to my room. 'You will go to the chapel this evening?' he said, with a look still more mysteriously significant than any that his countenance had as yet worn.—I gave a curt and decisive negative.—'Your lordship will not refuse,' replied the man, 'when I tell you that it is not the mother, but the daughter who now proposes to bestow the honour of an interview!'—You may imagine my astonishment at this announcement: I hesitated for a few moments; and then I rejoined, 'Yes, I will go:'—for I thought that if it were a guilty passion which had instigated the

mother, it could assuredly be naught else but a generous sympathy and a pure feeling which must be inspiring Marion the daughter. Accordingly, at six o'clock, the two men appeared; and I proceeded to the chapel. They retired, as on the preceding evening: they closed and bolted the massive door upon me. Then I looked towards the side door, half dreading lest it should only prove to be a base and infamous stratagem on Lady Galbraith's part to entice me thither: but my heart leapt with the strongest sense of relief, as well as with joyous hope, when I beheld Marion make her appearance. The young lady approached me with an air which bespoke a modest confusion and a certain painful feeling, blended with the virgin dignity which she sought to summon to her aid. I saluted her with the most respectful courtesy; and she at once said, 'My lord, you must regard this step which I am taking as a strange and unmaidenly one; but for my own sake, and considering what is naturally passing in your mind, permit me to observe that I am inspired by that feeling of compassion which in certain circumstances should be entertained towards one's fellow-creature. Permit me, my lord, to give you a few explanations, which though in some sense painful, must nevertheless flow from my lips.'—You may conceive, my dear Fleming, that I was listening with the acutest suspense, but at the same time with the most respectful courtesy towards that young lady whose whole demeanour indicated the strictest propriety of sentiment.—'I do not know why you are detained here, a prisoner within these walls,' she continued, 'for my father is not accustomed to reveal such secrets to my ears. But still, from the very circumstances in which you were brought hither, as well as from the language which you yourself held to my father yesterday, I feel convinced that you are the victim of some treachery, and that you have done naught to merit this dreadful captivity. Therefore, to speak candidly, my lord, I was already reflecting in my mind yesterday, after that interview, how I could possibly serve you, when your message was brought to my father, requesting the permission to visit this chapel occasionally. Ah! little did I suspect at the moment that the message emanated not spontaneously from your own mind, my lord, but that it was at the insidious instigation of one whom I am deeply pained and humiliated to think of in such a sense! The permission was accorded—and at the same instant I resolved to see you in the evening: for that private door communicates with a passage leading towards the suite of apartments occupied by our family. Accordingly, some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour past six last evening, when I deemed that you were in the chapel, and fancied that you were *alone* there, I stole hastily towards that private door. It opens with a secret spring, and moves noiselessly upon its hinges, as your lordship may have no doubt observed. I pressed the spring; the door opened slightly; I heard voices speaking within the chapel. I was about to retreat, when something which struck my ears riveted me to the spot. It was my mother who was speaking; and Oh, my lord! believe me that burning was the blush of shame which rose up unto my cheeks on account of that parent who seemed to feel no shame for herself!'—As you may suppose, my dear Fleming," remarked the Earl at this point of his narrative, "I felt deeply, deeply for the young lady who was compelled thus to speak of her mother in the presence of him to whom that mother's criminal overtures had been made and by whom they had been so indignantly repelled!"

"It was, in sooth, a sad and humiliating position for that young lady to be placed in," remarked

Fleming Fitz-Allan. "But still, my dear Roland, I am convinced that you deported yourself with so much mingled delicacy and courtesy as to relieve poor Marion Galbraith from much of the embarrassment she would otherwise have experienced."

"Believe me, my dear Fleming, such was my study during our interview," replied the Earl of Bassentyne. "But when once the ice was broken, so to speak, the explanations flowed more rapidly, and there was less restraint on either side. Marion Galbraith went on to say that she had lingered only at the private door sufficiently long on the preceding evening to learn the absolute refusal which I gave to her mother's criminal overtures, and then she stole back to her own apartment, overwhelmed with consternation, amazement, and grief.—'But when I was enabled to raise myself up as it were,' she continued, 'from the prostrating influence of my feelings, I resolved more than ever to make an attempt to restore your lordship to freedom. Oh, yes, my lord! it is now more than ever necessary that you should leave the fortalice, not merely for your own sake, but for that of my infatuated parent whose peace of mind will perhaps be only the more irremediably impaired the longer you are a sojourner beneath this roof! Therefore, my lord, it is not merely as a fellow-creature that I come to offer you the means of liberty, but it is likewise as a daughter anxious for the security of the honour, the welfare, and the peace of her parents. And Oh, my lord! if you accept of the means of liberation which I may be enabled to point out, I conjure you that when you return into the great world again, you will spare the repute of my mother; you will not blazon abroad the criminal delicacy of her conduct towards you!'—My dear Fleming," continued the Earl of Bassentyne, "I have already told you that my heart has been given to another; but I can assure you that when I beheld that noble girl before me, and listened to the language which flowed from her lips, while the expression of her countenance bore evidence to the chastity and virgin rectitude of her thoughts, I experienced a feeling of admiration which I can scarcely describe. And to you only, my dear Fleming—to you only, as my most intimate friend—shall ever be breathed the tale of Lady Galbraith's wanton levity of conduct and guilty overtures!"

"And you know, Roland," responded the young Knight, "that with me the secret is sacred. Yes!—for the sake of that noble-minded Marion, you ought ever to keep the seal of inviolable silence upon your lips in respect to her mother's misconduct!"

"And I did promise—and that promise shall henceforth be kept!" rejoined Roland. "Marion Galbraith expressed her gratitude for the assurance, and then proceeded to speak in the following manner:—'The two men who have been appointed to minister to you, are completely venal. You see that my mother was already bribing them over to serve her own purposes; and I am now doing so in my turn to accomplish the aim which I have in view. I will take care that all requisite arrangements shall be made to-morrow morning for your flight. Therefore, at eight o'clock you will be here, my lord; and soon shall you breathe the fresh air of freedom once more.'—'Lady,' I responded, 'you are placing me under an obligation which a whole life-time of gratitude will be incompetent to repay! But tell me, lady, what of my own followers who were captured with me, and from whom I have been kept separate?'—'On their behalf I can do nothing,' replied Marion Galbraith: 'they are lodged in a different part of the castle, to which on no possible pretext can I obtain access. But rest assured that

their imprisonment will not continue long after your escape shall have been discovered: they are retained in captivity simply that they may not have an opportunity of invoking the aid of your friends on your behalf. Your lordship need have no fear for their safety.'—'There is another point,' I said; 'on which I will be bold enough to address you, fair lady. It is with reference to the property that was taken from me at the time of my capture. I care not for the heavy purse of gold, nor for the gems and jewels; but there was one ring which I value.—'—'My lord,' interrupted Marion, 'I deeply regret my inability to render the slightest assistance on this head. I dare not breathe to my father a single syllable concerning your lordship's affairs. He will not know that it is I who shall have accomplished your escape: he will believe that you succeeded in winning over the two servitors to your interest; and no one will suspect me.'—'Not even your mother, fair lady?' I said.—'No,' she rejoined: 'how can she? Oh, never must she be aware that the secret of her criminal weakness is known unto her daughter! And now farewell for the present, my lord. To-morrow morning at eight o'clock punctually we meet here again.'—Having thus spoken, Marion Galbraith instantaneously retired, and the private door shut her out from my view."

"She is evidently a noble-minded girl!" interjectingly remarked Fleming. "And now I presume, my dear Roland, your narrative is coming to its crisis?"

"I have not much more to add," responded the Earl of Bassentyne. "I scarcely slept throughout the night, so agitated was my mind with suspense; and I bewildered myself with a thousand conjectures in respect to the means by which an escape from that castle could possibly be effected. When I arose in the morning, I looked from my grated window towards the opposite coast, and wondered whether my hope would be accomplished, and whether I should that day breathe the air of freedom on that Scottish mainland which I was thus surveying? Half-an-hour before eight o'clock the morning repast was served up by one of my attendants; and I saw by his countenance as well as by the civility of his manner towards me, that something important was in contemplation. But as he said nothing, I did not think it right to question him: I deemed it expedient and proper that Marion Galbraith's plan, whatsoever it were, should progress according to the details of her own arrangements. Punctually at eight o'clock the same man came to conduct me to the chapel; and on our arrival there, he locked himself in with me, instead of leaving me there alone as on former occasions. Marion Galbraith almost immediately made her appearance from the private door. I saluted her with a courtesy in which the fervour of gratitude naturally rendered itself apparent; and I saw that Marion was more or less agitated, though she quickly recovered her self-possession. But what was the plan of escape? and where were the means? Everything was arranged; and what followed was speedily executed. The man proceeded towards a recess in the chapel; and thence he brought forth a beam or wooden spar of some size, and to which the extremity of a rope-ladder was attached. I looked on with the utmost suspense, as well as with amazement; for I saw not for what possible purpose this rope-ladder could serve. I turned and flung an inquiring glance upon Marion. She smiled, and said, 'Your lordship is standing upon the means of your deliverance: the mode of safe egress is under your feet!'—I started in astonishment; but the mystery was soon cleared up. The man, bidding me stand a little aside, raised an iron ring

which was let into one of the flagstones wherewith the chapel was paved; and by dint of some little exertion he lifted the stone itself. A depth of utter darkness was revealed: but my ear caught the plashing sounds of water.—'Is he there?' demanded Marion anxiously.—'Yes, lady,' was the man's reply, as a light gleamed at the bottom of the abyss. The spar was now laid across the opening in the chapel-floor; and the ladder was lowered. The man hastened to descend; and as I still looked down into the abyss, I could distinguish a boat shooting from some unseen channel until it stopped exactly beneath the opening. The man who was in this boat carried a torch; and as he glanced upwards, I recognised his countenance: he was the other of my two servitors. All was now ready for my descent; and Marion said, 'Farewell, my lord.'—I took her hand, and I raised it to my lips as I poured forth a few parting words of the most fervid gratitude. Then I descended the rope-ladder, and took my seat in the boat, which the two men immediately began to propel forth from the subterranean creek where it had received me. Scarcely had it moved away from below the aperture when I heard a heavy splash caused by the falling of the spar and the rope-ladder which Marion had thrown down the opening; and this was followed by the noise of the flagstone fitting into its place overhead. Thus all traces of my escape were destroyed, so far as the interior of the chapel was concerned;—and who could now suspect Marion? As for myself, there I was in the very bowels of the Bass Rock, and exposed to perils which I little dreamt of at the moment when I first set foot in that boat. The creek, as I may so term it, which flowed underneath the chapel, and down to which a well had been dug to a considerable depth, communicated with the larger channel that flowed through a vast subterranean cavern perforating the base of the rocky island from east to west. This cavern is about six hundred yards in length; and in the middle a stupendous darkness prevails, for the light of day cannot penetrate far within the opening at either extremity. But the two men bore torches in their hands, as they guided the boat out of the creek into the larger channel—or, in other words, from the small diverging cavern into the main subterranean. In the former place it was not necessary to use the oars; for the passage itself was so narrow that the men guided the boat by pressing their hands against the rugged walls of rock. When the grand cavern was reached, the men bade me sit fast and cling to something, for that we should presently come to a cataract. The current carried us with tolerable rapidity along, the torches bringing into bold relief the stern, rugged, and almost awful appearance of the interior of that cavern. All of a sudden the men called out vehemently for me to hold tight; and scarcely was the warning given, when the boat began to dash along as if with the speed of a horse at full gallop—plunging down a descent where the eddying waters rolled with a terrific din. It was with almost lightning rapidity that the torrent had thus seized upon the boat and got it in its power; and it was with the greatest difficulty that either myself or my companions could save ourselves from being hurled into the turbid waters. The danger we incurred was frightful! No means was there to guide the boat: it would have been utter madness to put forth an oar or stretch out a hand to keep the bark away from the rugged jutting asperities of the rocky wall on either side. Thus every moment did I expect that the boat would be dashed to pieces. But no!—the torrent carried it in a line of unerring straightness, and speedily shot

us forth as it were upon smooth water. Then the two men betook themselves to the oars—the boat glided out upon the open bosom of the mouth of the Forth—and the Bass Rock was now behind us. In less than an hour we reached North Berwick, without having beheld any indication of pursuit from the castle. I asked the two men what their own views and prospects now were, as I perfectly well understood that they could not return into the service of Sir John Galbraith? They replied that their wish was to enter into my own service if I would employ them. I cheerfully answered in the affirmative; for they had behaved well and faithfully. Happening to be acquainted with a money-scrivener at North Berwick, I at once applied to him for a supply of funds; and having obtained the needful amount, I lost no time in purchasing three horses—so that with my two new followers I at once set off for my own castle. There, having by my presence assured my people of my safety, I tarried but a sufficient time to throw off my prison-worn travelling suit, and don my armour in order that I should be prepared to meet any fresh treachery that might develop itself in my path. But in my impatience to ride to Roslin and communicate all that I had endured, I tarried not for the escort which I had ordered to be in readiness to accompany me; and thus it happened that I was riding alone when I met yourself and Sir Casimir D'Este and gave you the tidings which led us all three with the least possible delay to Dalkeith."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PERPLEXITIES AND MYSTERIES.

THE young nobleman's history was terminated; and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan cordially renewed all his formerly expressed felicitations on his escape from the Castle of the Bass Rock.

"And now, my dear friend," inquired the Earl of Bassentyne, "in what mode would you counsel me to present this narrative of mine to the King? Justice I have already demanded—and justice his Majesty has promised me. The false knave Stephen Cochrane must be made to confess all those details which are for the present involved in so much mystery."

"By St. Andrew!" ejaculated Fleming indignantly, "there must be a searching investigation, and there must be condign punishment likewise! Yet must you tell your tale cautiously, Roland—for fear lest you should in any way direct suspicion towards Marion Galbraith as an accomplice in your escape."

"Not for worlds would I thus implicate her!" cried the Earl. "And there is another point to be considered,—which is that I were equally loath that any chastisement should overtake Sir John Galbraith for having lent himself to the persecution so mysteriously instituted against me. It is true that Marion did not in pointed speech demand that I would deal lightly with her father if it should chance to fall within my power to deal punishment against my enemies: but still the sense of gratitude which I entertain towards that generous and noble-minded young lady, naturally prompts me to forgive her sire for his share of the evil and to screen him from chastisement."

"Your intercession, Roland, will be sufficient to ensure all that you desire on these points," rejoined Fitz-Allan. "Besides, if after all it should transpire that King David was veritably the instigator of the wrongs you have sustained, he will not be

too ready to punish, but will gladly avail himself of your leniency as a means of throwing a shield of protection over his creatures."

It was now eleven o'clock in the forenoon; and the two young men were still pacing to and fro in the outer court-yard, watching all persons who entered by means of the upper gate. But still no Margaret! no Sir Casimir D'Este! Fitz-Allan stamped his foot impatiently, exclaiming, "Why does not my sister make her appearance?"

At this moment an individual arrayed in a handsome suit of armour, and with the large red cross indicative of the Teutonic Order upon the breast of his flexible mail surcoat, was seen crossing the court-yard.

"By St. Andrew, it is Jassent!" ejaculated Sir Fleming. "Sir Casimir must have come! What, ho! good Jassent!" he cried, beckoning towards the squire: "where is your gallant master?"

"He has not yet arrived, Sir Knight," answered Jassent: "but he will be here shortly. Certain tidings which reached him after we parted from yourself and my Lord of Bassentyne"—bowing to the Earl—"at Dalkeith the day before yesterday, have detained my knightly master longer elsewhere than he had anticipated: but you may rely upon seeing him at Dumbarton incontinently."

"Ah! 'tis well!" ejaculated Fleming. "And now tell me, good Jassent—tell me—for you know full well wherefore we sped to Dalkeith the day before yesterday,—have you seen aught of my sister Margaret?"

Jassent hesitated for a single moment in respect to the answer he should give; and then he said, "Oh yes, Sir Knight! I overtook your sister while on her way hither."

"By St. Andrew, this is joyous intelligence!" exclaimed Fleming, his countenance glowing with animation. "And you overtook her, good Jassent—"

"Yes, Sir Knight," was the response; but Jassent did not think it necessary to specify that it was on the preceding evening he had seen Margaret.

"Then she will soon be here?" ejaculated Fleming. "How long do you think it may possibly be—"

"I have not the slightest doubt, Sir Knight," rejoined Jassent, "that you will see your sister presently. If I might advise you to tarry here, in this court-yard, for a little while longer, I think that I may shortly be enabled to bring you tidings of Sir Casimir D'Este."

"We will wait!" exclaimed Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan. "Not merely do I long to have the pleasure of pressing the hand of my good friend Sir Casimir D'Este—but if we linger here, we shall the sooner behold my sister Margaret!"

Jassent now hurried away; and scarcely had he disappeared round an angle of the building, when the Earl of Bassentyne said to his companion, "Did you notice, my dear Fleming, those three or four stalwart men-at-arms who just now crossed the court-yard? They were all in plate armour, and they wore ample red scarfs so disposed as entirely to cover the front of their corselets."

"Yes—I observed them," responded Fitz-Allan; "and ere now, while you were relating your history, I noticed several others lounging about, arrayed in precisely the same style—in complete panoply of plate, each with an ample red scarf, and with a red tuft above the helmet. Methought that they might belong to the King's Guards; for in consequence of my seven years' absence from Scotland—and quitting the country too when I was a mere boy—I have forgotten the precise fashion of the arms and accoutrements worn by the royal troops."

"Those persons to whom we are both alluding do not belong to the King's body-guard," replied the Earl of Bassentyne.

"Then peradventure," said Fleming, "they are the retainers of some great peer who has designed to make a grand display—"

"I scarcely think, Fleming," interrupted Roland, "that this is the correct solution of that which is puzzling us. But Ah! here is Sir Richard Mildmay, who knows everything!"

The gentleman thus mentioned was a Knight of some fortune, and who without holding any official position about the court, nevertheless made it a rule to follow it in all its public movements and on great occasions. He was most anxious to have it believed that he was somewhat of a favourite with Royalty: he possessed an immense deal of curiosity: he was most persevering in ferreting out a secret or following up a clue to anything which he wished to ascertain: he was therefore often impertinent in the questions which he put, as well as rash and speculative in the theories that he advanced. He was between fifty and sixty years of age—a thorough old bachelor; and if he lived in the present time would be called an old *beau*. His apparel was always of the most exquisite fashion—but formed of gay colours and elaborate in its decorations, so as to invest the wearer with an air of juvenility. Such was Sir Richard Mildmay, whom the Earl of Bassentyne had descried crossing the court-yard with a sort of gliding, mincing step, and a jaunty demeanour.

"How fares it with the courtly and debonaire Mildmay?" was the mode of salutation in which the Earl of Bassentyne addressed the elderly Knight.

"In body, my lord, I am hearty," was the response; "and naught ails me—as might have been fully proven by the style in which I comported myself at the breakfast table this morning. But in mind, my lord—Ah! if I mistake not," he suddenly interrupted himself, bowing to our young hero, "this must be the gallant Knight Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, conqueror of the Douglas and Lord of Hermitage?"

"Yes—this is my friend Fitz-Allan," said the Earl of Bassentyne: then, when salutations had been exchanged by those who were thus introduced to each other, the young nobleman went on to observe, "You mentioned, Sir Richard, if I mistake not, that the condition of your bodily health was excellent: but methinks you said something in reference to the mind—and you appeared to sigh as if you had secret sources of trouble and uneasiness?"

Sir Richard Mildmay fixed his eyes with a ludicrous kind of significancy upon the Earl of Bassentyne for upwards of a minute; and then he said, "Things are in progress, my lord, which I do not understand; and when I do not understand, I am anxious to learn—and when I cannot learn I am restless and uneasy."

"And might I inquire, without being guilty of indiscretion," asked the Earl of Bassentyne, "what it is that you seek to ascertain, but which baffles your penetration? Ah! by the way, there are three of those stalwart warriors, Fleming, whom we noticed just now! Perchance Sir Richard may be enabled to inform us who they are?"

"May the foul fiend take me," ejaculated the old Knight, "if I can form an idea who they are!—and this is one of the things which are bewildering my brain—harassing my soul—and which must incontinently destroy my appetite. But look you, my lord—and you too, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan! Every one of those men has a red scarf spread out widely over the front of the corselet!"

"That is precisely what we ourselves have noticed," ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne. "But are there many of these men in the castle? Methinks I have not noticed more than a dozen or two in all."

"A dozen or two?" repeated Mildmay, bending a species of compassionate look upon the Earl, as if he pitied his ignorance. "Ah! if there were no more, one would fancy they were some nobleman's principal retainers pranked out—or some visitors from Holland——"

"Are there many, then, in the castle?" inquired Fitz-Allan, now experiencing a growing interest in the conversation.

"Many?" echoed the old Knight: and he moved his head up and down with a strange significance. "Do you behold that building yonder? It is a granary, to be used in times of siege. Well, it is empty now, so far as grain is concerned; but it is filled to overflowing with another kind of material!"

"What do you mean?" asked both the young men, as if speaking in the same breath.

"I mean that it is filled with warriors, of whom you beheld this dozen or two of samples lounging about in the court-yard," responded Sir Richard Mildmay.

"Filled with those warriors?" echoed the young men in amazement.

"Hush! hush! not so loud!" interjected Mildmay: "it evidently is not meant for everybody to know what is going on within these walls—no, nor outside of them either; and I am very much mistaken if when the time comes for the grand revelation to be made, it will not prove a startling one."

"What revelation can you possibly allude to?" asked Roland.

"Ah! that is precisely what I don't know and should like to find out!" ejaculated Mildmay. "It is very clear that something unusual is going on, and that something serious is intended. In the first place, I tell you, my lord—and you too, Sir Knight—that in yon building there are at least a thousand armed men packed away. I saw them just now: for let me tell you that when I appear to be sauntering about in a listless, idle, indifferent manner, I have both eyes and ears open; and when perhaps I seem to be seized with a fit of gazing up at the sky, I am all the more attentively watching the incidents that are taking place on earth."

"And you tell me, Sir Richard Mildmay," exclaimed Fleming, "that there are a thousand of these unknown warriors concealed in yonder building?"

"Yes; and what is more, they arrived during the night," rejoined Mildmay. "I came to Dumbarton yesterday; and after dusk I roamed about to see what I could and to hear what I could. Well, no harm in that, you will say? The first thing which struck me was a small party of armed men escorting three or four females. They entered with so much mystery! Then, an hour afterwards, numbers of troops began to arrive, all arrayed in precisely the same style as the warriors who had escorted the ladies; and yet they all marched like so many silent noiseless ghosts—for there was not a steel boot that trampled upon the stone pavement, nor a spur that rattled. And yet as I have a soul to be saved, a thousand of them thus entered the fortress last night!"

"But how do you account for this, Sir Richard?" asked the Earl of Bassentyne.

"Oh! as for the noiseless tread of the warriors," responded the old Knight, "that is easily explained by the circumstance of a stout woollen hose being drawn over every steel boot. But who the warriors

themselves are, and whence they come, and why they are congregated here,—it is all this that constitutes a mystery which I cannot solve!"

Fleming Fitz-Allan had become deeply thoughtful: but he kept his eyes riveted on the building which was said to contain the armed men.

"But this is not all," resumed Sir Richard Mildmay. "I was just now speaking to my friend Sir Ambrose Challoner, who only arrived some couple of hours back; and he assures me that—But hush! come a little on one side, and don't let us speak too loud!"

"Of what did your friend Sir Ambrose Challoner assure you?" inquired the Earl of Bassentyne, when the trio had retreated to a safe distance beyond ear-shot on the part of the sentinels at the gate.

"Sir Ambrose told me," continued Sir Richard Mildmay, "that as he set out at sunrise from his own castle, he beheld at a distance something which seemed to be an immense surface of mingled quicksilver and scarlet; and it was all in motion. His two squires beheld the same phenomenon, but accounted for it differently. One said it was an army of knights all in bright steel panoply, and with red scarves, plumes, and pennons: but the other declared that it was a mere delusion produced by the sun shining on the Leven and on fields full of red flowers. Now, though Sir Ambrose is certainly very old and purblind—and though his two fat squires have likewise about a century to share between them—yet may the foul fiend seize me if I do not believe that there was some better foundation for the tale than the reflection of the morning sunbeams on the river Leven and the adjacent fields!"

"You are pensive, Fleming?" said the Earl of Bassentyne. "What think you of all this that we hear?"

"Who? I?" ejaculated Fitz-Allan, as if suddenly startled from deep reverie. "What does Sir Richard Mildmay think?"

"He thinks," responded the old Knight, "that there is something ominous in the background! Was it to strengthen himself against the Black Douglas and all his faction, that the King gathered these troops? No!—for was not his Majesty certain from the outset that his own faithful barons and peers, with all their retainers, would be stronger in number than all the host of discontented lords and rebellious vassals? Then why this muster of steel-clad warriors here? Why this gathering——"

"Perhaps," interrupted the Earl of Bassentyne, "it would be even a still more difficult question, whence come these troops at all? Are they Scotch? or are they foreign?"

"Ah! who can tell," said Mildmay, shaking his head mysteriously. "But what does the King mean? Does he purpose to strike a blow at the liberties of the Scottish nation?—does he purpose to abolish the parliamentary institution and reign absolute? Or does he——"

"What?" inquired Roland of Bassentyne.

"Ah! what indeed!" asked Mildmay, in a low voice and with a continuous series of mysterious shakings of the head. "There are strange rumours afloat amongst those who are in the habit of watching the signs of the times: but chiefly there is a whisper——"

"Of what?" demanded Roland.

"Of a contemplated invasion——" and Mildmay pointed southward, towards England, as he thus spoke.

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan started so suddenly that both the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Richard Mildmay observed it; and as they turned their eyes upon



him, they perceived that his countenance was glowing with the animation of an unmistakable heroism.

"Ah! it is always the case with you young hair-brained warriors!" ejaculated Sir Richard Mildmay. "You only think of winning laurels on the battlefield: and in your chivalrous ardour you imagine that wherever the Scottish banner waves, it heralds a Bannockburn—whereas, alas! it may on the other hand portend a Nevill's Cross! But farewell for the present, my lord: farewell for the present, Sir Fleming. We shall meet again presently. An idea has now struck me!" he continued, with a knowing look. "I will just go and give a peep into the kitchen, the buttery, and the larder; and ascertain what kind of preparations are in progress—for we may thence estimate what number of persons will presently receive garrison rations."

Away glided Sir Richard Mildmay, extending his mincing step somewhat—but swinging himself with an air of the most jaunty unconcern, as if he were merely promenading for his amusement, and not peering about with any ulterior purpose.

"What think you, Fleming, of all that we have just heard?" asked Roland of Bassentyne, as they resumed their walk to and fro.

"I can only think at present," responded our young hero, "of the tidings which we received from Jassent, and which have relieved me of so much suspense!"—but Fleming spoke evasively; for anxious though he felt on his sister's account, yet there was now another subject which was producing an effect, all thrilling, glowing, exhilarating, and almost intoxicating, upon him.

"Ah, true! Your sister will doubtless soon be here!" said the Earl. "But is it not strange that these troops—"

At this moment Sir Richard Mildmay was seen again gliding towards the two young men; and as he approached them, they observed that his countenance wore an expression so exceedingly knowing and mysterious that it gave him an air which was perfectly ludicrous.

"Ah! you have made some discovery, most courtly and debonaire Knight?" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne.

"Yes: and may the foul fiend seize me," responded Mildmay, "if it was not a discovery which I verily but little expected! Of course, when I beheld yon individual in the mail surcoat with the broad crimson cross upon his breast, I was not astonished—"

"It is Jassent to whom he is alluding," ejaculated the Earl to Fleming Fitz-Allan. "See! he is crossing the yard yonder!"

"Yes, Jassent—the squire of the Teutonic Knight Sir Casimir D'Este," resumed Sir Richard Mildmay. "Well, I was not astonished to behold him with the vivid red cross; because all the world knew that Sir Casimir D'Este was in Scotland, and that he had a squire with him—"

"What means this long tirade, my dear Mildmay?" asked Bassentyne. "Do you know that you are becoming tedious?"

"Ah! tedious do you call me?" ejaculated the old Knight. "Surely one ought to have one's own way of approaching the climax of a story;—and if you had seen that which has just smitten my eyes—"

"And what was it?" asked Roland, somewhat impatiently.

"You observe that tall steel-clad warrior with the red scarf, wending his way yonder? Well, just now, as I turned the corner of the building, that individual was coming from the opposite direction. You might have experienced a sudden gust of wind some four or five minutes back—"

"By St. Andrew! Mildmay, you are growing intolerable!" ejaculated Bassentyne. "What was it that happened?"

"Simply this—that the gust of wind all in a moment lifted the scarf from the front of the corslet: and behold! there was the cross of the Teutonic Order! Yes!—and the granary bristles therefore with a thousand Teutonic spears! And who can tell but that yonder, amidst the shades of the woods on the banks of the Leven—who can tell, I ask, but that the mass of quicksilver and of scarlet which Sir Ambrose Challoner beheld, may not after all prove to be an army of those foreign warriors as terrible as they are mighty?"

"Ah! it may be so," said the Earl of Bassentyne in a thoughtful manner.

No audible word escaped Fleming Fitz-Allan's lips: but in his heart he ejaculated, "Yes—by St. Andrew, it is so!—and I am to be their leader!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

ELVIRA'S NARRATIVE.

WE must now return to the audience-hall, to which we have already introduced our readers. We have described how Margaret, accompanied by Maude and the two tirewomen, was ensconced in a latticed gallery, where she might be an unseen witness of all the proceedings: we have stated likewise that King David was seated upon a throne—that the accused Earl of Douglas was upon his right hand—and that the Lady Elvira Ramsay stood in front of the dais to tell her tale of accusation against that nobleman. The Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, being already acquainted with that history in its minutest details, had no particular motive to keep them in the audience-hall while that narrative was being repeated; and thus, as we have seen, they preferred to remain in the court-yard, in expectation of beholding the arrival of Margaret. But the Earl of Caithness was a spectator of the proceedings in the audience-hall; for it was at his instance, so to speak, that the investigation had been entered upon—it was under his protecting auspices that the unfortunate Lady Elvira was seeking redress for her wrongs—and it was in pursuance of guarantees given to the Earl of Caithness that the Black Douglas had appeared on the present occasion.

Elvira Ramsay was about five-and-twenty years of age. She was of tall stature and well-shaped: her features were regular; and their expression was naturally pleasing, except at those moments when her eyes flashed vivid fires and her looks indicated the fiercest hatred against the Black Douglas. Her hair was dark—her eyebrows were somewhat thickly pencilled, though they were nobly arched: dignity and elegance blended in her demeanour; and thus, as she stood before that audience in the character of a wronged and outraged woman, her personal appearance seemed full well calculated to give all the greater effect to the narrative itself, and to augment the feeling of interest which the tale alone was certain to inspire.

"Nearly twenty years have elapsed," she said, "since the date of an occurrence which constitutes as it were the starting-point of all my recollections and associations from that tender age until now. It was one evening at the close of autumn, that my father was walking through a grove at no great distance from his Castle of Dalhousie. He held me, his little daughter, by the hand. I was an only child, and was therefore the darling of my sire. My mother had perished in giving me birth; and thus

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upon me were concentrated all the affections of the noble heart possessed by Sir Alexander Ramsay. On that particular evening of which I am speaking, and which is so memorable a one, my father had taken me to see my foster-mother—a worthy peasant woman who dwelt in the neighbourhood of Dalhousie Castle. Though late in the year, it was a beautiful evening: the moon rose early—and its lustre was poured upon our pathway through the grove, the trees of which were fast shedding their leaves. Oh! I remember that night as well as if it were of yesterday I am speaking! My father was leading me along, talking to me with his usual gaiety and kindness,—when all in a moment some half-dozen armed troopers darted forth from the shades of the wood and seized upon my sire. His weapon flashed from its sheath, and one of his assailants was stricken a corpse to the ground: but the next moment my father was overpowered. The armed horsemen placed him on a steed and were about to hurry him away, when he besought that his child should not be left to lose herself and perish in the mazes of the grove. Alas, my poor father! he could bend himself to intercede on my account even with his bitterest enemies! Oh! never shall I forget how I flung my arms about my sire's neck, and how I clung to him, when one of the men hastily lifting me up, tossed me as it were to my unfortunate parent; and then I nestled on his breast during the rapid ride to the place of our destination. That place was Hermitage Castle; for all Scotland has long, long known that it was Sir William Douglas, the Knight of Liddesdale, by whose command my father was seized upon and borne to that fortalice. Yes!—and all Scotland knows likewise," added the Lady Elvira, "that my unfortunate sire was doomed to the most horrible of deaths!—he was rendered the victim of a sentence such as only a fiend could have decreed! He perished by the lingering process of starvation!"

Here Elvira paused for upwards of a minute; and a profound silence reigned throughout the audience-hall. It was no new tale that she was telling—at least not this portion of it; for the hideous tragedy of Sir Alexander Ramsay's fate in the dungeons of Hermitage was horribly familiar to the knowledge of every one. But when this tale was now told from the lips of the victim's daughter—when it was proclaimed by the tongue of her who had been a witness of the arrest, and who had suffered so fearfully by the bereavement—the interest of the tale was enhanced to an awful degree.

"In resuming my narrative," continued the Lady Elvira, "I must return to that fearful date of nearly twenty years back! The moment the gate of Hermitage Castle closed behind my unfortunate father, we were separated. I was torn from his arms; and a stern chieftain who made his appearance, angrily demanded why a screaming child had been brought thither? That chieftain was the Knight of Liddesdale himself: but I did not know it until afterwards. One of the troopers caught me up and hurried away with me. I cannot describe the awful, the hideous sensations of mingled anguish and terror that seized upon my young heart; for I thought that the trooper was going to kill me. He however spoke kindly and soothingly, with the assurance that he would do me no harm. He took me to a distant part of the castle, and into a room where a female was engaged in some domestic concerns. This was his wife; and amidst all circumstances which are so replete with pain and horror and anguish for me, it is a relief to be enabled to mention with a feeling of satisfaction and gratitude the name of Elspeth Gowrie. Yes—she became

almost the same as a mother unto me! Weeks and months passed—I knew not what had become of my father—but I used constantly to inquire wherefore wicked men had set upon us in the grove and why we were not allowed to return to our own Castle of Dalhousie? And likewise I passionately besought to be taken to my father, wherever he might be. The good Elspeth did all she could to tranquillize me, to appease my fears, and to buoy me up with hopes that I should soon see my sire again. I was too young to reason upon the subject—too innocent and artless to form horrible conjectures—too confiding to perceive that Elspeth was deceiving me, though heaven knows that it was with the purest motive! for the poor creature could not bring herself to reveal the appalling truth to a child of such tender years as I was. And then too, childhood soon accustoms itself to a change of condition; and it looks upon whatsoever transitions and phases it may pass through as being natural enough. Thus upwards of four years elapsed; and my age was consequently about ten, before I learnt the appalling fact that my father had been murdered by the cold-blooded process of starvation! It was a discourse between Elspeth and her husband which I accidentally overheard that made me aware of the circumstance which for more than four years had been so religiously concealed from me. I will not dwell upon the anguish and the horror which I experienced on making this fearful discovery: Elspeth did everything she could to console me. She was childless—she loved me as much as if I were her own daughter—and she had hitherto treated me as such. No friends nor relatives had claimed me from her hands: and this circumstance may be speedily explained. At first the utmost uncertainty prevailed in respect to the sudden disappearance and the fate of my father Sir Alexander Ramsay; but when by degrees the secret began to ooze out and to be first whispered abroad, it was rumoured that I, his hapless daughter, had perished at the same time and by the same fate. Then, shortly afterwards, came the preparations for war against England—the march of the gallant army which you, sire, led—and then—and then—"

"We know what you would imply," said King David. "You mean that *then* came the fatal fight at Nevill's Cross, which plunged so many Scottish families into mourning, and which in its fatal consequences was indeed only too well calculated to divert attention from every other subject!—for alas! what subject could possibly be more solemnly important than *that*? But if at the present time," continued David, "I can with patience hear allusion made to Nevill's Cross—and if it is even with a certain outward calmness that I myself can breathe the name—it is because I know it to be written in the book of destiny that the same monarch who caused the catastrophe shall yet live to avenge it. And that monarch is myself!"

These words produced a deep impression upon the greater portion of the audience, and seemed to justify the rumour that had been already whispered abroad, and to which Sir Richard Mildmay had alluded in his conversation with Roland and Fleming in the court-yard, to the effect that another invasion of England was contemplated.

"Yes, sire," continued the Lady Elvira. "the campaign which terminated so fatally at Nevill's Cross did indeed absorb all minor considerations. In respect to myself it did more: for the only relatives whose guardianship or protection I might have claimed, perished in that same fight. Thereupon a distant kinsman, whom I had never seen and scarcely ever heard of, took possession of Dalhousie; so that

I; the unfortunate Elvira, was altogether forgotten or ignored in the only quarter where I might have hoped to inspire any interest. As for the fierce Knight of Hermitage himself, I need scarcely observe that he was taken prisoner at Nevill's Cross and was conveyed to London. All these things had happened before the secret of my unfortunate father's fate was by accident revealed to my ears, as I have already explained. But, so soon as I discovered a part of the sad truth in respect to my own position, Elspeth needed no longer to hesitate in the revelation of the rest. To be brief, I found that I was an orphan—an outcast, so to speak—fortuneless—scarcely better off in a worldly point of view than the most obscure and humble girl—and altogether friendless save in respect to Elspeth and her husband; for the trooper himself had taken a liking to me. What could I do? whither could I go? what rights had I to assert or claims to make elsewhere? The alternatives were to become a homeless wanderer, or to remain at Hermitage in dependence on Elspeth's humble bounty. And this I did;—and the worthy woman behaved towards me with all the tenderness of a mother. Time passed on—and years went by. Still was the Knight of Liddesdale a prisoner in England: but anxiously did I await his return. Oh! I am not about to conceal the reason for this feeling; on the contrary, I am proud of it! It was that, as my intelligence expanded with the lapse of years and the growth of my stature, I yearned to avenge the horrible death to which my sire had been doomed. This idea, at first vague and uncertain, at length became a fixed one in my mind; and then I felt as if I had naught to live for but the realization of that idea. It was only this thought which retained me still a resident in the Castle of Hermitage—the scene of my father's fate—after I had reached that age when at sixteen or seventeen I was enabled to adopt a decisive purpose and to comprehend that my sire had died a death which must be avenged. But time continued to pass on without affording me the opportunity of wreaking that revenge; for the Knight of Liddesdale came not back from England. At length, one day—it was between six and seven years ago—there was considerable excitement inside the walls of Hermitage Castle, and preparations were evidently being made for the reception of some distinguished personage. I flew to Elspeth, almost breathless with suspense, to inquire whether these preparations were to welcome the return of the Knight of Liddesdale himself? She replied in the negative—but explained that a kinsman of the absent Knight was coming to sojourn awhile at the castle, and that therefore everything was being done to receive him with fitting honour. That kinsman of the long absent Knight of Liddesdale arrived at Hermitage. Need I say that I allude to the Earl of Douglas, who now stands in the presence of your Majesty?"

The Black Douglas flung a scornful and contemptuous look upon Elvira; but her eyes darted at him lightnings so rapid and vivid that he quailed in spite of himself.

"Yes—the Earl of Douglas came to Hermitage Castle," proceeded Elvira; "and he represented himself as armed with authority to enact the part of lord and master of the fortress during the absence of his cousin the Knight of Liddesdale. This, as I have already said, was between six and seven years ago. Not many days had the Earl sojourned within those walls ere he beheld me. I was then about eighteen years of age; and, to my misfortune, my appearance was such that it attracted the notice of the nobleman who stands there. He made inquiries, and was astonished to learn who I was. He spoke to me with seeming kindness, declaring

that the daughter of a powerful chief as my sire had been, must not be permitted to wear a peasant's garb and languish in obscurity as the adopted child of a menial couple. The Earl of Douglas spoke so fair, and I was so inexperienced in the duplicities of the world, that I listened and believed in the truth and sincerity of all he said. He commanded that a suite of apartments should be well appointed for my accommodation: he procured rich dresses and jewels for my use. In my grateful confidence I spoke frankly to him, when methought that he was dealing in all honourable candour in his own speech and conduct. Thus was it that he gleaned from me the secret of the revengeful intents which I cherished against his kinsman, the murderer of my sire! He applauded me for the resolution: he proclaimed it to be a duty which a child owed to the shade of her murdered parent; and he volunteered to further all my aims when opportunity should serve. I was surprised—I was even astounded; for I had shuddered with terror the very moment after I had been betrayed into such confidential revelations. But then the Earl spoke of love—he declared his passion—and he vowed that it was this profound and honourable sentiment which he cherished towards me, that had induced him to adopt my cause and offer to share in the task of avenging it. I believed him:—Oh! how could I doubt? Never was language so specious!—never was behaviour so well calculated to deceive! Whatsoever inconsistencies there might seem to be in his conduct, were rendered seemingly consistent by the language which flowed from his lips. And so I believed. Yes—and I believed too in the validity of all the arguments which he adduced in support of the alleged expediency of a private marriage. Oh! standing now in the presence of Scotland's Majesty," exclaimed Elvira, raising her voice, "I know and feel that I shall not plead in vain for that justice which my wrongs demand, and which the crimes of the Earl of Douglas ought retributively to receive! For thou, O King, who art the fountain of all justice!—and ye likewise, members of this august assemblage in whose presence I am telling my sad tale!—ye will all feel the indignant blood boil in your veins when ye learn how I was betrayed, outraged, and dishonoured by this false nobleman. A few words will suffice to make known the extent of my wrongs and the magnitude of his iniquity. A mock marriage—one of his own creatures dressed up as a priest—the most sacred of ceremonies thus scandalously perverted and desecrated—religion's holy formalities abused and outraged, that his gross passions might be satisfied at the expense of my honour! Yes, all this was done—and I the victim!"

Elvira's countenance was ghastly pale as she thus spoke; but her eyes shot forth vivid lightnings. There was something terrible in her appearance—something indeed so fierce and unfeminine at the moment, that the softer feelings of interest which her narrative was calculated to excite, were impaired and deadened. It was therefore a cry of indignation which arose against the Earl of Douglas, unaccompanied by any murmur of sympathy on behalf of Elvira Ramsay. Loud and almost general was that cry; and while the Black Earl, folding his arms across his breast, darted looks of rage and defiance around him, the King felt himself trembling on his throne, and he could not help asking himself, "What would be thought if it were proclaimed that I, the King—the authority whose justice is now appealed to—had done precisely the same?—a mock marriage, with a creature dressed up as a priest for the purpose!"

The cry of indignation—which not even the pre-

sence of Royalty had repressed, and which was elicited from the chivalrous hearts of those who revolted at the idea of so stupendous a wrong—that cry died away: the Douglas, with an assumed air of careless indifference, retook the seat from which he had started up; and several nobles who were his friends—or at least fancied that their own interests were concerned in befriending him—ejaculated, “One tale holds good till another be told!”

“And what denial can possibly be offered to such a tale as this?” demanded Elvira, in a loud indignant tone, as she swept around her looks, every lightning-glance of which appeared to strike a vociferating partisan of the Douglas. “He will not deny it!” she proceeded, as she pointed with mingled scorn and defiance, hatred and contempt, at the Black Earl. “But if to all his other crimes, he should now think of superadding perjury, there are witnesses who may be brought forward. There is the good Elspeth Gowrie! There is her worthy husband,—who though he was amongst the party which upwards of nineteen years ago captured my unfortunate sire, nevertheless knew not at the time for what a hideous fate the victim was doomed, and who has since often and often expressed his sorrow that he should have been in any way an accomplice in the sad tragedy. But let me make an end of my tale. For full two years did I exist in the confident belief that I was the legally wedded wife of the Earl of Douglas:—for two full years did I cradle myself in the idea that I was a Countess who in due time was destined to take a place among the peeresses of Scotland! But suddenly the vision was dissipated; and I learnt that I was dishonoured and betrayed. Wearied of the excuses and the pretexts whereby that false nobleman continuously postponed my recognition as his wife—ending my false position to be no longer endurable—knowing that I was looked upon as a mere wanton light-of-love, while in my own soul there was the deep conviction that the religious bond indissolubly united me to that man, I insisted that our marriage should be proclaimed. I ceased to implore and beseech: I saw that prayers and entreaties were unavailing; and I threatened. Then did the Earl of Douglas announce to me the fatal truth. He pleaded a variety of circumstances with the details of which I shall not now trouble your Majesty nor this august audience—he called all his powers of sophistry to his aid, to induce me to put faith in the depth of that passion which had urged him on to a course of deception, as well as to believe in the existence of certain grave reasons which prevented him from entering the marriage-state. But for a long time I was not to be soothed nor pacified,—until I began to reflect upon the necessity of altering my own plan of proceeding, and of dissembling in my turn. I yearned for revenge against the Knight of Liddesdale; and I thought it was *only* the Earl of Douglas who could help me to that vengeance. But then my idea of vengeance itself expanded; and I longed to punish not merely the assassin Knight who had murdered my father, but likewise the treacherous Earl who had followed up his kinsman’s iniquity by betraying my own honour. The name of Douglas itself grew hateful to me: it became associated with all my ideas of anguish, pain, and suffering. A Douglas had robbed me of my father! another Douglas had robbed me of mine honour! Therefore in my heart I exclaimed, ‘Vengeance upon each Douglas! Vengeance upon the Knight first! vengeance upon the Earl afterwards!’—and so I dissembled: I pretended to become pacified, and reconciled to my condition; I ceased from all complaint: I bided my time. I continued to remain in the seclusion of Hermitage,

never asking to go beyond its walls. I even did such violence to my feelings as to affect to love that man:”—and she pointed scornfully to the Earl of Douglas. “Yes—I simulated love while hatred was in my breast! I bestowed endearments where I longed to plunge the avenging dagger into the black heart of him who by his character had earned the epithet of the Black! It was thus that upwards of four more years passed away: but heaven ordained that circumstances should eventually flow in a channel different from that which my hopes and prayers had indicated. The Knight of Liddesdale came back the other day from a captivity of eighteen years in the English metropolis: but he visited not Hermitage; and as all the world knows, he fell a victim to the assassin—blows dealt him by his kinsman who stands there! That was not the vengeance which I sought; neither were these blows dealt in vindication of my father’s death, but to suit the selfish purposes of the assassin himself. Therefore no thanks do I owe *him* that he should have thus cut off the kinsman into whose heart I had hoped that my own hand would plunge the avenging dagger! After that event circumstances flowed on rapidly—as you, sire, and all whom I now address, know well. Hermitage Castle was stormed—the Earl of Caithness was released from captivity there—so that to him, as well as to Sir Casmir D’Este and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, the tale of all my wrongs was told. They promised me justice; and I am now here to claim it at the hands of your Majesty.”

With these words Elvira Ramsay made a graceful reverence to the Monarch, and retired to a seat some little distance on the left hand of the dais.

“Lady,” said the King, “if it should happen that the Earl of Douglas shall proclaim a bold denial of the grave and serious allegations which you have advanced against him, who be the witnesses that you will call forward in support of your statement?”

“Gowrie and his wife, may it please your Highness,” responded Elvira. “They are here in attendance. They were present at the mock-marriage which at the time they believed to be a legitimate and an honourable one: it was not until my lips proclaimed to them the full extent of the Earl’s atrocity that they knew how wofully I was betrayed.”

“My Lord of Douglas,” said the King, turning to that nobleman, and assuming the stern air of one who was resolved to deal forth inexorable justice, “you have heard this lady’s tale; and as it stands, ’tis full of grave and serious matter against you. Speak, my lord!—what answer have you to give thereunto?”

The Earl of Douglas had caught a glimpse of the trooper Gowrie and his wife Elspeth amongst a crowd of persons at the further extremity of the hall, underneath the latticed gallery where Margaret and her female attendants were seated; and he saw that it was useless to deny the main facts of the charge brought against him. Indeed, he had all along made up his mind to carry matters with a high hand, or else with the policy of seeming contrition, if they should go against him. He had not however forgotten the promise which his chaplain, Father Julius, had made to assist him in the hour of need by the revelation of some extraordinary secret; and though he had never seen the priest since the secret expedition to Roslin Castle, yet he was not without the hope that his lost partisan would now suddenly turn up to fulfil the pledge he had made and turn the scale in his favour. But in vain had the Earl continuously cast his eyes around upon those who thronged in the audience-hall: he beheld not Father Julius.

"Still, at the last moment he may come!" thought the Earl of Douglas to himself; and it was unaccountable to him why the chaplain of Tantallon should have disappeared so suddenly, and why he should still keep away.

"Sire," said the Earl of Douglas, in answer to the words which the King had addressed to him, "I will not render it needful for the Lady Elvira Ramsay to produce the witnesses to whom she has alluded. But in admitting that she is not my wife and has no right nor title to proclaim herself Countess of Douglas, I thank heaven that the facts are so. From her own lips your Majesty and this august assemblage have heard sufficient to prove that she is a woman of fierce and violent passions; and in order that she may make out her case as strongly as possible against me, she has not hesitated to confess the bloodthirsty vengeance which she cherished alike against my kinsman and myself! I praise my guardian saint for shielding me from the necessity of grasping at that of a wife the hand which, as she herself has proclaimed, yearned to wield the murderess's dagger! And now, sire, one word more. If your Grace's intervention must be invoked on behalf of every wanton who chooses to stand forward and proclaim that she has been wronged, methinks that your Highness will be compelled to sit daily and hourly in high court of justice: for where be the gallants who have not at some time or another had recourse to exceptional means to subdue the coyness of an already half-judging fair one?"

A murmur of disapprobation, mingled with several cries of "Shame!" followed the concluding part of the Earl's speech; and the Lady Elvira, starting up from her seat, exclaimed, "I repel with scorn and indignation the aspersions which you, false lord, would fain throw upon mine honour! For as I have a soul to be saved, I swear that if I had not believed you were conducting me at the time to the altar sanctified by the presence of a veritable priest, I should not have accompanied you thither! And now, sire, forasmuch as the Earl of Douglas has in no sense denied the statements which I have brought against him, I demand from your august hands the infliction of such penalties as the most rigorous sense of justice may deem needful to meet this case."

The Lady Elvira resumed her seat; and King David appeared to reflect for a few minutes, while a profound silence reigned throughout the hall. Presently the King beckoned a page towards him, and hastily whispered, "Has anything yet been seen of Sir Casimir D'Este?"

"No, sire," responded the page, also speaking in a low voice, and accompanying the answer with the wonted respectful obeisance.

"This is strange, and most perplexing!" muttered the King to himself. "Wherefore can he thus remain absent?"—then again beckoning the page towards him, he inquired in a still lower tone than before, "Has aught been seen or heard of Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan?"

"Nothing, sire," rejoined the page. "It is but a few minutes since I came from the gates, and the sentinels have beholden nothing of that lady."

"This at least is well," said the King to himself, with a strong feeling of satisfaction. "Now let us hurry over the present scene, and all will be right!—My Lord of Caithness," exclaimed David, raising his voice, and looking up towards the gallery in which the Earl was seated, "have you in your capacity of adviser and champion on behalf of the Lady Elvira, any observation to make before we proceed to bring the pending case to its end?"

"I would simply remark, sire," responded the

Earl of Caithness, "that although I cannot sympathize with the fierce expressions of vindictiveness which have emanated from the lips of the Lady Elvira Ramsay, yet must I urge upon your royal notice the fact that much allowance is to be made for that unfortunate complainant. The peculiar circumstances of her position—painful as that position has been since her very infancy—must be taken into due consideration. Deprived of her father by the cruelty of one personage bearing the name of Douglas, and of her honour by the treachery of another scion of that family—having for long years lived in a species of prisonage in a lonely Border castle—excluded from the sphere which, if left to the natural course of circumstances, she might have embellished and gladdened—she is not to be judged by the rules of any ordinary standard. These few words have I with all due deference urged in her behalf, and I now leave the case in the hands of your Majesty,—confident that you will this day convince your people that justice shall take its course without respect of persons."

The Earl of Caithness resumed his seat,—meeting with a calm and dignified defiance the enraged look which the Earl of Douglas flung upon him. The King, after reflecting for a few moments, beckoned the Black Earl towards him.

"My lord," he said, in an under-tone, "the case is most grave against you; and it behoves me to pass a sentence proportionately severe. If I now speak privately unto you, my lord, it is with the paternal feeling of a Monarch. I therefore warn you, my lord, that you submit with all due reverence, contrition, and grace to the judgment I am about to pronounce. Believe me that I have the means to repress any rebellious demonstration; while on the other hand, a humble demeanour on your part will at once have its due effect in mitigating the sentence, and may hereafter induce me to display still further leniency by the revocation of that judgment and the proclamation of a full pardon for past offences. Now then, my lord—how say you?"

The Earl of Douglas looked slowly around the hall: but his scrutinizing regards encountered not the features of Father Julius. The nobleman was troubled by the confident and determined way in which the King had spoken; and he knew that his friends were not in sufficient force to make any demonstration in his favour. Even this knowledge he had without being at all aware of the presence of the tremendous military power which had been stealthily assembled within the castle-walls: but still the conviction was strong in his mind that David must have adopted unusual precautions for the present occasion.

"Sire," he said, in a low tone, and assuming a humble look, "your Grace will take into consideration the fact that I surrendered myself here this day."

"Tis well, my lord," replied David: "but I also recollect that the Earl of Caithness held in forfeit your Barony of North Berwick as a guarantee for this appearance on your part. Come, my lord—I must bandy no more words with you in an under-tone; or those around us will imagine that I am tampering with justice. You are submissive to your King's decree?—is it not so?"

The Black Earl bowed—and said in a very low voice, but with an expressive look, "The family of Douglas has rendered too many services to the Scottish throne to permit the Monarch to prove ungrateful by the exercise of too much severity."

The King waved his hand for the Earl to stand aside; and he then exclaimed, in a loud voice, "Sentence is about to passed! Let the usual proclamation be made."

A herald accordingly proclaimed "Silence!" three times; and then he demanded whether any one present had any reason to advance wherefore the royal judgment should not be promulgated?

At this moment Jassent, who had been listening to the latter part of the proceedings, issued hastily forth from the hall, and sped into the court-yard. There he found Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and the Earl of Bassentyne still walking to and fro together, — Sir Richard Mildmay having again left them to peer about in other quarters and ascertain, if possible, whether there were any additional cause for wonder or speculation.

"My lord of Bassentyne," said Jassent to the Earl, "if you will be pleased to proceed to the audience-hall, you will presently have an opportunity of bringing your own case before the King."

Roland saw that Jassent had some reason for wishing him to repair to the hall, and likewise for temporarily separating him from Fitz-Allan; and believing that whatsoever the squire might do, was in reality the result of a wise inspiration from Sir Casimir D'Este, he hesitated not to obey. He accordingly proceeded in the direction of the hall; and the moment he was beyond earshot, Jassent said, "Speed you, Sir Fleming, to yon building; and there you will find a thousand friendly lances to be wielded, if necessary, in a cause which vitally concerns many interests that are dear to your own heart! Keep your ears open; and at the first sound of this bugle," added Jassent, displaying a gilt horn which hung to his belt, "you will know how to act."

Without tarrying to speak another syllable, Jassent hurried away, retracing his steps in the direction of the audience-hall; while our young hero—bewildered at the sudden instructions he had received, but enthusiastically excited thereby, as he felt that he was hovering on the threshold of great and important events—lost not a moment in hastening to the building which contained the thousand Teutonic Knights.

CHAPTER L.

THE SENTENCE PRONOUNCED.

MEANWHILE the Earl of Bassentyne had entered the audience-hall, which he reached just at the moment when the herald concluded the tedious and lengthy formula of the proclamation by which he demanded whether any one had motive or reason to advance wherefore the King's sentence should not be promulgated? Roland remained standing near the entrance of the spacious hall, so that he might not create any interruption by pushing his way towards the dais on which the King was seated. He thus tarried beneath the latticed gallery which contained Margaret and her maidens; and while on the one hand he was concealed from Margaret's view, he himself on the other hand was very far from suspecting how near he actually was to that lady.

Just at the moment when the herald had finished his proclamation, a side door in the neighbourhood of the dais opened, and a warrior of tall stature, arrayed in a splendid suit of steel armour, which shone like silver, made his appearance. A large plume of crimson feathers waved above his helmet: the scarf, of a similar hue, which passed over the right shoulder down to below the left hip, was embellished with a golden fringe; and upon the front of the corslet which the folds of that sash only partially concealed, was the broad red cross indica-

tive of the Teutonic Order. The visor of this warrior's helmet was raised; and the countenance of Sir Casimir D'Este was at once recognised by those who were acquainted with that Knight.

But few, if any, then present—unless it were Jassent, who was now re-entering the audience-hall—had ever seen Sir Casimir D'Este arrayed in so splendid a panoply. The instant Margaret caught sight of that crimson scarf only partially concealing the red cross upon the breast-plate of the corslet, she started—an idea struck her—she glanced at Maude—and she perceived that the same thought had smitten the young girl likewise. Could the party which had escorted her from the neighbourhood of Dalkeith to Dumbarton Castle on the preceding day, have consisted of Teutonic warriors?—could the red scarves which they wore so completely folded over their corslets, have been meant to conceal the sacred symbol? Yes!—Margaret felt convinced that it must be so, and that by some means or another she had after all been befriended by Sir Casimir D'Este. But why should he have interfered so mysteriously on her behalf?—how had he the power to do so?—whence came the warriors who had escorted her?—by what means was such respectful treatment ensured her within the walls of Dumbarton? Did Sir Casimir know her secret? and if so, how did he obtain a knowledge of it? Had he made her brother and the Earl of Bassentyne acquainted with it?—or had he kept it to himself? What was now to take place? how was her cause to be brought forward? was she to choose her own opportunity? or would it be afforded her by circumstances? These and a thousand other questions did Margaret rapidly ask herself: but how could she possibly give satisfactory answers to any of them? All was doubt, bewilderment, amazement in her brain—but no misgiving, no mistrust! There was a tremulous joy in the very suspense which she experienced: the presentiment was strong in her mind that if Sir Casimir D'Este had really proved himself her secret friend, and had so strangely combined a variety of arrangements to meet all the circumstances of her extreme need, he must unquestionably possess the power to help her still further onward to a successful issue.

The appearance of Sir Casimir D'Este produced a considerable sensation in the audience-hall. Those that knew who he was instantaneously whispered his name to those who might not have happened to have seen him before; and for several reasons he was an object of the utmost interest. The proofs of extraordinary valour which he had displayed since his arrival in Scotland,—the defeat of the Douglas Borderers at the Unicorn tavern—the rescue of Albertina on the pathway in the glen—then the storming of Hermitage—and subsequently the conflict in the armoury of Roslin Castle,—all these feats had established the renown of Sir Casimir D'Este upon the Scottish soil, and had excited the enthusiastic admiration of its gallant and warlike people. But there were other reasons which attached a degree of interest to Sir Casimir D'Este. People had recently been asking themselves for what purpose a Teutonic Knight could have visited the Caledonian shores, and wherefore he should have held conferences with the King, as by this time it was known he had done. As is usual in cases where ignorance of the actual truth prevails, conjecture had been busy in forming theories to account for all that was thus mysterious. But without dwelling any longer upon the subject, we may observe that some faint idea had already begun to prevail that the presence of Sir Casimir D'Este in Scotland might not be altogether uncon-

nected with a project on David's part for another invasion of England; and thus was it that the words which the King had ere now spoken on that subject in the midst of Elvira's history, had touched a chord which in almost every heart vibrated to the allusion.

Sir Casimir D'Este, on entering the audience-hall, bowed with knightly courtesy to the King, and then inclined his plumed head to the audience generally. Recognising the Earl of Caithness in one of the galleries, Sir Casimir bowed with marked friendliness of manner towards that nobleman; and as his gaze then slowly wandered round the hall, it struck Margaret that his look lingered for a moment upon the latticed front of her gallery. We should add that to the Lady Elvira Ramsay Sir Casimir bowed with an expression of countenance which indicated the most generous sympathy on account of the wrongs which she had sustained. As for the Earl of Douglas, he stood with his arms folded across his breast, and his looks slightly inclined downward: he affected not to take any notice whatsoever of Sir Casimir D'Este—but strove to seem as if he were altogether ignorant of his presence. Yet the warning words of the King had been too recently spoken in his ear to suffer the Black Earl to indulge in any of those haughty scornful looks with which in any other circumstances he might have thought fit to express his indifference in reference to whatsoever was in progress.

"I am bound to make my excuses to your Majesty," said Sir Casimir D'Este, approaching the King and speaking in a voice intended for the royal ear alone, "that I should have been thus tardy in showing myself at Dumbarton Castle: but there have been many things which have occupied my attention——"

"I have learnt sufficient, Sir Knight," responded David, "to convince me that you have not been idle and that all things have gone well."

"Did I not assure your Majesty the day before yesterday at Dalkeith Castle," asked Sir Casimir, "that within a very short time there would be on the Scottish shore a disembarkation of a sufficient number of brave Teutonic warriors to serve as an earnest of the good intentions of my Sovereign, his Highness Prince de Salza, in fulfilling the treaty secretly entered into with your Grace?"

"Yes—it was thus you spoke, Sir Knight," answered David, still adopting an undertone; "and your words have been justified. Yet doubtless you yourself thought not at the time that the troops were so near?"

"It was not until I reached Edinburgh, after parting from your Majesty at Dalkeith," replied Sir Casimir, "that I was aware the vessels containing the advanced guard had actually gone round to the western coast, and that therefore they could be so conveniently landed at Dumbarton and in the neighbourhood."

"And how many have landed in all?" inquired the King.

"Some fifteen hundred, may it please your Majesty," answered Sir Casimir. "As your Grace already knows, there are a thousand concealed within the walls of this fortress; and in the valley of the Leven at a little distance there is a choice squadron of five hundred horsemen, all belted knights, and each one fitted to be himself the leader of an army! In short, sire, every precaution has been taken; and if the Douglas, together with those peers who are his friends, entertain thoughts of mischief, a single word proclaims their doom! Therefore, sire, act with energy and firmness, so that you may at one and the same time convince all your subjects that

you are strong enough to set your rebellious vassals at defiance, and that you are resolved the throne shall prove the fountain of immaculate justice."

The King bent a significant look upon Sir Casimir, as much as to imply that he would assuredly follow the advice thus given: and then he said, speaking loud enough to be heard by the entire audience, "I am well pleased that so esteemed and renowned a knight as Sir Casimir D'Este should have arrived to pay his court at this particular moment; for he will behold how the King of Scotland maintains his own power, dignity, and prerogatives—and how at the same time he holds the scales of justice with an impartial hand. Sir Casimir, you are already acquainted with the Lady Elvira Ramsay's sad history. From her own lips did you receive it at Hermitage Castle. The Earl of Douglas has not gainsayed the allegations which it contains; and it is to all intents and purposes an acknowledgment of guilt which his lordship has thus made. I was therefore about to pronounce such sentence as in my royal wisdom, under heaven's blessing, I deemed requisite to meet the urgency of the case——"

"In good sooth, sire," interjected Sir Casimir D'Este, "the august audience here assembled, cannot have done otherwise than anticipate the nature of the judgment which the lips of your Highness are about to promulgate."

"How so, Sir Casimir?" asked the King, fancying that there must be something significant in the Knight's words—some well-meant hint or suggestion which was intended to be conveyed, but which he himself had failed to comprehend.

"I mean, sire," answered Sir Casimir, "that inasmuch as in the present instance there is only one sentence which can possibly be pronounced——"

"Sir Knight," interrupted the King, looking somewhat angry for a moment, "it is for me to use my discretion as a judge, and to decree such pains and penalties——"

"Pardon me, gracious sire," interrupted Sir Casimir; "but is it well to suffer the Earl of Douglas to look upon the sentence about to be pronounced in the light of a pain and penalty? Rather let him be encouraged to acknowledge, with whatsoever degree of manly frankness he may be enabled to display, that it is but an act of justice which he is about to render the Lady Elvira Ramsay, even though it be performed in obedience to your Majesty's bidding and as the result of this solemn investigation."

"By what right does this personage," exclaimed the Earl of Douglas, now giving way to the rage which had long been pent up in his breast,—"by what right does he seek to stand betwixt my Sovereign and myself, to sway the royal mind to my prejudice?"

"The royal mind, Lord Earl," responded Sir Casimir D'Este, with a cool dignity, "must have been made up from the very first. His Majesty cannot have failed in his wisdom to perceive that there is but one sentence which can possibly meet the case."

"Nay, Sir Knight," interjected David, "my opinion holds not with yours. I now comprehend your meaning: and I see that your purpose is good in offering us a suggestion which indeed is only consistent with the chivalrous generosity of your disposition. But such words of hatred have passed betwixt that wronged lady and this accused Earl, that not for a moment did I entertain the thought of decreeing such reparation as that to which I now perceive that your language points."

"Aye, sire," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "doubtless there has been strong language used by that injured lady in reference to this treacherous Earl!—and no



doubt, on the other hand, the Earl himself can be violent and malignant towards one who has brought him to the bar of justice! But I deferentially submit that this same justice must nevertheless take its course."

Here the Earl of Caithness rose in the gallery where he was seated, and said, "May it please your Majesty, when I ere now addressed your Grace in a few words bespeaking the most humane consideration on behalf of the Lady Elvira Ramsay, it was with the idea that your Majesty would decree precisely that amount of reparation, neither more nor less, to which the worthy Knight Sir Casimir D'Este has just alluded. In short, sire, the only justice which can be rendered to the Lady Elvira Ramsay, is to be honourably and legally wedded to the Earl of Douglas."

"Never!" exclaimed the fierce noble, his dark countenance becoming almost hideous with the scowling rage and scornful indignation which were expressed upon it. "No! by St. Bride of Bothwell—"

"Sire, he hears you in the presence of your whole court!" said Sir Casimir D'Este, in a quick undertone to the King.

"Silence, my Lord Earl of Douglas!" exclaimed David, who now found himself forced to play a part of the most unquestionable energy; but in a hurried whisper to Sir Casimir he added, "It is you that have done this! S'death, Sir Knight! why did you interfere?"

"I thought, sire," answered the warrior, with a calm dignity, "that your Majesty was disposed to treat me as a friendly adviser and confidential counsellor."

"True! true!" ejaculated David, petulantly, but still in an under-tone. "Yet this, meseems, is no friendly part which you are playing,—rendering matters more than ever complicated, just at the very instant when I was smoothing them down and bringing them to the most pleasant issue! For look you, Sir Casimir,—methought that a temporary exile from Scotland, with a fine of a few thousand merks, and perhaps the addition of some penance to be imposed by one of our high church-dignitaries, would be amply sufficient to meet the justice of this case,—a sentence sufficiently severe to prove a real punishment for the Douglas and to paralyse him for the future, but yet in no sense detrimental to his honour as a peer and a knight."

"And what sense of honour, sire," asked Sir Casimir D'Este, with a slight smile of scorn upon his moustached lip, "has this nobleman whose hand is red with the blood of his kinsman the Knight of Liddesdale, and whose foul treachery towards the Lady Elvira has been made so manifest? Sire," added the Teutonic Knight emphatically, "if I am to be regarded as a friendly adviser, it is my duty to point out what I believe to be the duty of your Highness as a king, as a judge, and as a man."

David was confounded at the part which Sir Casimir D'Este was thus so unexpectedly enacting,—assuming almost the attitude of a dictator, instead of appearing only as an unquestioning supporter of whatsoever he might be called upon to sustain. David began to fear that he had overreached himself in endeavouring by a particular line of policy to win Sir Casimir entirely round to his own interests, and that he had raised up a master in one whom he fancied to be content to play the part of a mere creature. But the King saw that it was too late to retreat—or at least that this was not the moment to make any attempt to retrieve the error he had committed: he felt himself to be entirely in the power of Sir Casimir D'Este, who had a thousand lances at his command in the granary,

and the array of five hundred spears on the banks of the Leven. He saw therefore that he must act with the most cautious policy and with the shrewdest judgment.

"Seeing and considering how capable is the worthy Teutonic Knight to give counsel alike in peace or in war," said the King, at length breaking silence, and addressing the audience generally, "I feel that whatsoever flows from such lips must not be lightly regarded. This being so—and taking into consideration likewise the words which have lately fallen from the tongue of the Earl of Caithness—it were perhaps but fair to seek from the Lady Elvira a knowledge of her own views and sentiments in the pending case. Speak, lady—how say you? Will you accept the hand of the Earl of Douglas—"

"By St. Andrew, sire!" ejaculated the fierce noble, his eyes flashing fire, "I would sooner cut off this hand of mine!"

"Again he hears you, sire!" hastily whispered Sir Casimir.

"Silence, my Lord Earl of Douglas!" ejaculated the King, thus urged on by the Teutonic Knight to display what seemed to be the most decisive firmness of character. "I warn your lordship against another interruption of these proceedings. If it occur, it shall be accounted an insult unto myself—and by St. Andrew, shall be so avenged!"

Again was the Earl of Douglas smitten with the conviction that the King had adopted the amplest possible precautions against any rebellious questioning of his authority; and moreover the presence of Sir Casimir D'Este disturbed the Douglas considerably in those intervals when he was not prevented by his fierce passions from envisaging all the details of his position. The Black Earl therefore held his peace; but he scowled menacingly at Elvira, as much as to bid her take terrible warning in respect to the answers she might be about to give.

"Lady Elvira Ramsay," resumed the King, "although I can full well anticipate what your response will be, and that you will scorn the idea—"

"Nay, sire," interrupted Sir Casimir D'Este, but speaking in a low tone, "I pray your Majesty not to mar the course of justice by seeming to put words in the lady's mouth."

The King gave a start of visible impatience; and he flung upon Sir Casimir a look which was as much as to demand, "Why, in the name of heaven, are you doing all this? and what can your object be in seeming to thwart me?" But audibly he said nothing.

"The Lady Elvira, sire," said Sir Casimir, quietly, "awaits your Majesty's question."

"Ah, true!" said the King, forcing himself to appear calm and dignified, though smarting under a sense of what he believed to be some wrong that he was sustaining at the hands of the Teutonic Knight. "Lady," he continued, "answer me this question frankly. If the Earl of Douglas were to offer you his hand in reparation for the injury which he hath done you,—how would your answer be?"

"Love I have none for the Earl of Douglas," responded Elvira, while the whole audience awaited her answer with the utmost suspense; "but much love have I for my own good name—and this has to be repaired and set right in the presence of the world. Therefore, sire, I say *Yes*!—I will accept the hand of the Earl of Douglas!"

This reply, which was in reality most unexpected by the greater portion of the audience, created an immense excitement. The Earl of Douglas, again losing all control over his passions, was about to

give vent to a furious tornado of words,—when he felt his sleeve suddenly pulled; and on glancing round, he beheld one of his staunchest adherents, Lord Kirkmichael, at his elbow.

"You are defeated in every sense!" hastily whispered Kirkmichael; "your cause is totally lost! Your friends would have made an effort, however desperate, if matters had been otherwise. But as they are——"

"What mean you?" demanded the Black Earl in most anxious suspense.

"I mean," replied Kirkmichael, "that the castle swarms with those cut-throats of Teutonic warriors! Sir Richard Mildmay has just assured me that it is so! Be cautious—be wise! Your game is lost now; but it may be won hereafter—and it may be crowned with vengeance likewise!"

Having thus hastily whispered in the ear of the astounded and discomfited Earl of Douglas, Lord Kirkmichael retired quickly to the group of nobles, at the side of the hall, from which he had stepped forward; while the Black Earl himself sank upon his seat with such a thorough sense of physical and mental exhaustion that he had perhaps never felt before. The King glanced at him; and perceiving how utterly discomfited he was, David took courage, grew completely relieved, and muttered to himself, "If the lion submit thus tamely to his doom, I am well content that it shall be inflicted. I only thought that it was going too far: but it is evident Sir Casimir thinks otherwise—and by St. Andrew! it seems that he is right!"

"Sire," resumed the Lady Elvira, speaking with a dignity that almost partook of assurance and hardihood—for there was no inconsiderable amount of boldness in her manner, confronting that audience and telling her tale of disgrace as she had done,— "sire, I should indeed incur the imputation of levity of character, and might be deemed a wanton and a profligate, if I were to reject the only means of repairing my outraged honour. To become the wife of the Earl of Douglas is a great evil; but to remain unwedded with the stigma that is now upon my chastity, were a still greater evil. I choose the lesser of the two!"

"Hear, sire, how this woman speaks!" said the Earl of Douglas, raising his countenance in a forlorn and piteous manner towards the King; "and then tell me whether it be not showering curses on my head to command me to link my fate with such a tigress in female form!"

"To wed the Douglas," retorted Elvira, her burning eyes flashing fire, "it were needful to have the energy and the fierceness of a tigress, in order to match the rage and fury of the lion!"

"With all due deference to the presence of Majesty, whence alone ought to emanate words of rebuke in this hall," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "I would fain counsel you, my Lord Earl of Douglas, to abstain from uttering aught that may provoke the recriminations of that lady; and as for you, Lady Elvira, I would earnestly beseech that you suffer not yourself to be hastily angered. For let it well be understood—as I read this august's Monarch's mind aright—it is his purpose to impress all Scotland with a great moral example this day—to show that he admires the principles of justice and of rectitude—that he has no sympathy for men who become the base betrayers of confiding women—that he views with abhorrence the impiety and blasphemy of simulating religious ceremonies and perverting the holiest forms of the church to the vilest and most perfidious ends—and that whosoever dares trifle with such forms and ceremonies, shall be assuredly rendered amenable to commensurate and befitting punishment. These are the

lessons which the Royalty of Scotland is this day determined to teach his subjects; and I am proud that I, owing allegiance to another sovereign, should be present on an occasion when so sublime a part is performed by the ruler of Scotland."

It was with a lofty power of eloquence that this speech was delivered; and there was something indescribably commanding—we might even say majestic—in the appearance of Sir Casimir D'Este, as he enunciated those sentiments in a voice that was alike sonorous and harmonious. To the audience generally they appeared to be only just those very sentiments which were appropriate to the case under consideration, and that they were indeed suggested by it. But to Margaret in the latticed gallery the speech appeared to have a certain significance more or less applying to her own case. The gentle Maude seemed to think so likewise; for she gazed up with a meaning look of tenderness and hopefulness into the countenance of her mistress.

But what thought the King? what effect did that speech produce upon him? First he listened with the complacency of a monarch who was pleased at receiving an eulogy from the lips of one whose words he knew would be received as an authority: but as Sir Casimir progressed, the King grew uneasy—he too fancied that there was a certain significance in the oration—he grew more and more perturbed—he looked at Sir Casimir—he eagerly scanned his countenance, enframèd as it was in the bright steel of the helmet—but the Teutonic Knight was gazing around him upon the audience, and did not once turn his eyes upon the King until the speech was concluded, when he bowed with a courtesy which seemed to imply, "I have only done your Majesty justice in saying all this on your behalf."

Bewildered and dismayed—labouring under a vague terror—weighed down by a consternation which he vainly endeavoured to shake off—endeavouring to persuade himself that the Teutonic Knight had only spoken at random, and had no ulterior meaning in his words,—David strove to rally himself as it were by turning his thoughts into another channel, and hastening onward the proceedings that were specially under his cognizance.

"From all that has taken place," said the King—and every one now observed that his look, his manner, and his speech were different from what they had previously been, so that for the most part the change was attributed to sorrow at being compelled to pronounce so rigorous a judgment against the Earl of Douglas,— "it only remains for me to decree that the wrongs of the Lady Elvira shall be repaired in the sense whereunto she has given her concurrence. Therefore I call upon you, Lord of Douglas, to take the Lady Elvira Ramsay by the hand, and to pledge yourself that with the least possible delay you will make her your lawful wife."

"And wherefore not take the best possible guarantee, sire," asked Sir Casimir D'Este, "for the fulfilment of the judgment which your Grace has just pronounced?"

"What mean you, Sir Knight?" inquired the King, who was half bewildered and distracted by his own thoughts.

"In good sooth, sire," responded Sir Casimir, "it were not well, considering all antecedent circumstances, to leave the fulfilment of this marriage to the honour or goodwill of the Earl of Douglas; and therefore do I deferentially suggest the taking of that guarantee which is the best in such a case. In other words, let the Lady Elvira become Countess of Douglas at once. Here, sire! the chapel is at hand——"

"What! so hurried a wedding, Sir Casimir?"

exclaimed the King, scarcely knowing what he said.

"By St. John of Jerusalem, sire!" replied the Teutonic Knight, "I have known bridals more rapidly resolved upon!"

The King turned very pale, and then instantaneously affected to be using his kerchief as an excuse to conceal his face. He nevertheless looked hard the while at the Teutonic Knight, to ascertain whether there were anything covert and ulterior in his speech: but Sir Casimir's countenance was inscrutable.

"Then if there must be a bridal," said the King,—"and of a surety I see not why it should *not* take place,—there must be witnesses—a priest——"

"Oh, these are all at hand, sire!" exclaimed the Teutonic Knight, who now appeared to have taken upon himself the complete direction of all the proceedings, as if he were a judge and an arbiter who had displaced the King himself, and who likewise appeared as if he were wondrously ready-witted in catching at expedients, or else as if he had all his arrangements previously settled even to the minutest detail.

The utmost excitement and curiosity prevailed amongst the audience: and no wonder, for the whole proceedings were taking a turn so little anticipated by most of the spectators present—and the King himself, at the outset so dignified and firm, so confident even to self-sufficiency, seemed to have become a mere puppet in the hands of the Teutonic Knight!

"Yes, yes," said Sir Casimir, "there be plenty of witnesses at hand! The whole audience may serve as witnesses for that matter! But we need two specially to sign the marriage document. Ah, well! the signatures must be those who have had no voice in the present proceedings. Your Grace, therefore, cannot honour the couple by giving your own royal autograph. As for myself, I would proffer my humble services—but I too am incapacitated, seeing that I have had speech in the matter. But here is one that will serve the purpose. Come hither, my friend Redman! Your Majesty may not have forgotten this worthy soldier: but if it should be so, let me name him as the Lieutenant of Roslin Castle."

The King now stared in stupid astonishment—though it seemed to the audience generally that he was merely looking on at Sir Casimir's proceedings with a certain degree of surprise at their precipitancy and compassion on account of the Earl of Douglas. But the King was literally stupefied. What meant the bringing forward of Redman as a witness in the forthcoming bridal? Was it simply an accidental circumstance—the random occurrence of the moment? or was it meant to be fearfully significant and typical of *another* scene that had been enacted *elsewhere*?

"'Tis well! we have one witness!" said Sir Casimir, proceeding as if with the most natural air in the world. "Now let us obtain another! Ah, by St. John! here is a very proper witness, seeing that he was with me and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, in his capacity of pursuivant, when we stormed Hermitage and found the Lady Elvira a resident within its walls. What ho, Master Stephen Cochrane! I opine you are fresh from Edinburgh or elsewhere? But no matter! Your coming is opportune to serve as a witness now."

Deeper and more absorbing became the stupor of consternation and dismay which seized upon the King: he felt as if a web of iniquities were closing in around him, and as if he were on the point of experiencing exposure, disgrace, and infamy in the presence of that crowded assembly. But all of a

sudden he rallied himself as if by a preternatural effort; and he inwardly ejaculated, "Idiot that I am to give way to these terrors! They are all accidents and coincidences, without ulterior meaning, aim, or purpose!"

"We have the witnesses, sire, in readiness," said Sir Casimir. "Would your Majesty be pleased to command the bridegroom to lead the bride to the altar?"

"By St. Andrew, Sir Knight! you are marvelously quick with your bridal arrangements!" ejaculated the King, now affecting to be in an excellent humour, and doing his utmost to pump up his spirits so as to allay his own fears and convince himself that he had hitherto been frightened at bugbears. "We have seen you as Marshal of the Lists—we now behold you as Matrimonial Master of the Ceremonies! But how now, Sir Casimir? where is the priest?"

"Ah, true, sire!" cried the warrior: "I had well-nigh forgotten the most essential. A priest! a priest!"

"A priest?" exclaimed a voice. "Did I hear you, most worthy master of mine, asking for a priest?"—and it was the voice of Jassent which thus spoke, while the faithful squire was seen making his way through the crowd in the immediate vicinity, at the same time leading forward a reverend personage whose face was completely concealed by the hood of his ecclesiastical garb.

"Ah, then, there is a priest at hand!" ejaculated Sir Casimir D'Este. "I should know him likewise. By St. John of Jerusalem! 'tis most fortunate and fitting!—for the Lord Earl of Douglas will be wedded by his own chaplain to the Lady Elvira Ramsay!"

"Ah! say you so?" exclaimed the Black Earl, now starting from a gloomy and moody reverie. "Is it you, sir priest?"

"Yes—'tis he!" ejaculated Sir Casimir: "it is Father Julius!"

The priest had by this time stood forward; and he now flung back his cowl, revealing his countenance. One glance at those features, and the King started up from his seat as if stung by a serpent.

"What!" he ejaculated. "This man——" and gasping for the power of further utterance, he stood pointing to the priest.

"Yes, sire," said the Earl of Douglas; "this is my own chaplain. For some weeks I have missed him—but he comes perhaps in time—I know not—for 'tis not in friendly company that I find him!—yet he vowed that it was in his power to proclaim a secret——"

"And no one here present," said Sir Casimir, "will prevent him from revealing whatsoever secret he may have to proclaim. If an honourable one, good and well: if dishonourable, then 'twere still better told than buried in mystery."

"A secret!" gasped the King: and he sank down upon the seat from which he had started up.

"Your secret! your secret!" exclaimed the Earl of Douglas. "Fulfil your promise, holy father, if you can!"

"Speak!" was the low-uttered command delivered by Sir Casimir D'Este in the ear of the priest.

"Then know ye, all who are here present," exclaimed Father Julius, raising his voice, "that it was I who had the supreme honour of joining the hands of his Majesty the King of Scotland and Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan!"

In the midst of the tremendous sensation which this announcement occasioned, the lattice-work in front of the gallery at the end of the hall, yielding to a secret spring that was suddenly touched, fell

apart,—revealing Margaret and her maidens to the host of spectators.

“Scots, behold your Queen!” exclaimed Sir Casimir D’Este, extending his arm towards the gallery and bowing with a graceful courtesy to the heroine of this wildly romantic drama.

At the same time Jassent, hastening out into the court-yard, put his bugle to his lips; and as the clear metallic harmony rang through the sunlit air, the huge portals of the granary were thrown open—and thence marched forth a brilliant procession of Teutonic warriors, with Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan at their head.

CHAPTER LI.

IS SHE SCOTLAND’S QUEEN?

THE purposes of our tale again compel us to break off the thread of our narrative at one of its most exciting points; and though it may for the moment seem that it is almost a specimen of the bathos to divert thus abruptly the attention of the reader from the grand personages of our narrative to so comparatively humble an individual, and frivolous withal, as Sir Richard Mildmay,—yet to this peering and prying Knight must we return.

When Sir Richard left the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan a second time, it was, as we have seen, with the object of pursuing his researches, and ascertaining, if possible, whether there were any fresh mysteries connected with the present state of affairs. He had discovered that the immense granary was filled with a host of warriors of the Teutonic Order; and he was well inclined to believe the intelligence whispered to him by his friend Sir Ambrose Challoner, to the effect that there was a perfect array of knights in the valley of the Leven. This tale, though immensely exaggerated, was nevertheless founded upon fact: for there were in reality five hundred Teutonic horsemen stationed as a reserve and corps of observation on the bank of that picturesque little river. Fancying however that this latter host was as mighty as his gossiping and purblind friend Sir Ambrose had represented, Mildmay naturally thought within himself that it was more than probable there might be a perfect swarm of Prince de Salza’s warrior-subjects disembarked on the Scottish soil and concealed in every available place within the walls of Dumbarton and in the neighbourhood of the fortalice. Now, it struck him that such a place for concealment might well be the armoury of the castle, which he knew to be a spacious hall; and rejoicing in the new idea, as well as impelled by a fresh feeling of curiosity, he resolved to elucidate the point. Accordingly, he lost no time in wending his way towards the armoury; for he had frequently been at Dumbarton Castle on previous occasions, and was well acquainted with its internal arrangements.

On his way to the armoury through various passages, he encountered Lord Kirkmichael, with whom he was on terms of intimacy; and to this nobleman he whispered the fact in respect to the host of Teutonic warriors who were located in the granary. It was through sheer love of gossip that the antiquated Knight described the discovery he had made: he had no idea of conveying any special warning through Lord Kirkmichael to the Douglas—he had no sympathy with the cause of the Black Earl: he had scarcely any political leaning whatsoever; but if compelled to make a profession of faith on the point, he would have declared in favour of the King’s interests and objects. To Kirkmichael how

ever the information proved of the utmost importance; for this nobleman, being devoted to the Earl of Douglas, was seriously considering at the instant the expediency of rallying all the friends of the same side for one grand demonstration on behalf of the peer who was then upon his trial. We have seen how effectually this notion was nipped in the bud, and how Lord Kirkmichael deemed it prudent to advise the Black Earl to make the best of a bad business for the present, in the hope of amending matters and wreaking vengeance upon his enemies at some future day.

Little thinking, however, that his gossiping information had produced such important results, Sir Richard Mildmay, on separating from Lord Kirkmichael, pursued his own way to the armoury, which he presently entered. Dumbarton, being essentially a military fortress, was provided with an armoury on a far larger scale than Roslin Castle: and it contained not only the materials for the warlike equipment of a great number of men, but likewise numerous mementoes and trophies of deceased heroes, past achievements, and bygone times. Sir Richard found—considerably to his disappointment—that there was no one in the armoury, and that he was enabled to enter it without the slightest difficulty or questioning. Indeed, there was not a soul except himself in the vicinity thereof; for those persons who might otherwise have been engaged in that part of the castle, had been led by a common feeling of intense curiosity to the audience-hall.

On reaching the threshold of the armoury, Sir Richard Mildmay stopped short on beholding the place was empty; and he was about to retrace his steps for the purpose of pursuing his researches and investigations elsewhere, when he perceived a flask and two or three goblets upon the table in the centre. Sir Richard was fond of good wine; and he had run about on this sultry July day until he had worked himself into no inconsiderable degree of heat; so that he thought a refreshing draught would be by no means unwelcome, while the sunbeams glinting through the long narrow windows, showed him that the bottle was not empty.

“Ha! ha!” he muttered to himself; “the warden of the armoury was so overpowered by his curiosity in respect to the proceedings of the audience-hall—or else he must have been so abruptly summoned elsewhere, that he left his flask unfinished. We will see if his wine be potent. These fellows commonly know where to burrow for a good stoup in the cellars of their chief.”

Thus speaking, Sir Richard Mildmay advanced to the table—filled himself a goblet—and quaffed it with the air of one who was not merely athirst, but who found the present vintage to his special liking. As with a sigh of pleasure he deposited the emptied goblet upon the table, he looked slowly around; and his twinkling eyes rested upon a sword of unusual dimensions which was suspended amidst other warlike trophies to one of the walls of the armoury. No other sword was there throughout the place at all approaching it in magnitude; and it was evident that no common hand must have been required to grasp that weapon, and no ordinary arm to wield it. Sir Richard recognised it at once: indeed he had often seen it before. Though frivolous in his old age, he had been no mean warrior in his earlier years; and the eyes which had just been twinkling with the potent effects of wine, now sparkled with martial enthusiasm as they riveted their gaze upon that trophy of bygone prowess.

“Ah, brave Sir William!” he said, thus apostrophizing the shade of the hero to whom the weapon had formerly belonged: “wee worth the day to Scot-

"land on which thou wast betrayed into the hands of the ruthless King of the Southrons! Matchless Wallace! thy patriotism availed not long for thy native land! Who could compare with thee?—unless it were the mighty Bruce whose valour accomplished the grand work which thou hadst so nobly begun! Ah, if there were but a few such as thou at the present day, our King would not hesitate nor waver in respect to taking vengeance upon those false fierce Southrons at whose hands he likewise has suffered so much! To gaze upon that sword makes me feel young again; and the blood seems to course and leap in my veins as if it had never felt the stagnating influence of age!"

Sir Richard Mildmay—who, with all his frivolity, his puerile curiosity, his gossiping propensities and his dandyism, possessed a good heart—wiped away the tears from his eyes; for it was indeed the sword of Wallace which he was contemplating, and which had elicited the apostrophe we have recorded. The ponderous weapon, which had been so often and so nobly drawn in Caledonia's defence, and which had many and many a time dealt such awful havoc amongst the English foemen, was preserved as a relic at Dumbarton; and there it hung to the wall of the armoury, an emblem of the giant might which had been associated with the grandest and loftiest patriotism!

Sir Richard Mildmay, at length withdrawing his eyes from the sword of Sir William Wallace, was about to retire from the armoury, when he beheld upon a side-table a huge volume fastened by an iron chain to the ponderous woodwork on which it rested. What this volume was, he likewise knew; for, as we have already said, he was no stranger at Dumbarton Castle, and the curiosities of the armoury were well known to him. It was a book in which all the ancient statutes and laws were entered,—as a matter of course in manuscript, for the art of printing was then unknown. On previous occasions Sir Richard had glanced at the contents of the book, without however diving particularly into the details of its dry lore: but now a sentiment of curiosity inspired him—he scarcely knew why—and he approached the table on which the volume rested. He began to turn over the pages—listlessly at first—until his eyes settled upon some feature of interest. Sir Richard was a scholar, considering the times in which he lived: he could read and write with the utmost facility—which was more than many a proud baron could boast of: he prided himself upon his intellectual acquirements, and was indeed often considered pedantic as well as foppish, prying, and garrulous.

He had not been many minutes turning over the leaves of the ponderous record, several portions of which were defaced and blackened with the effects of time, when his attention was riveted upon a particular heading; and deeming the subject curious, he paused to peruse that entry. It proved to be a law passed in some long bygone age in respect to Royal Marriages. This law had not been repealed or abrogated, as was evident on the face of the page itself; for a line had been drawn across all records of statutes no longer in force. As Sir Richard read on, he muttered to himself, "This is curious!—by St. Jude, it is curious! I never knew of this before! Why, in good sooth 'twere enough to invalidate a royal marriage if the conditions herein specified should not happen to be regarded in full compliance! 'Tis something to add to my stock of knowledge—which, though I say it who should be the last to make the vaunt on my own account, is by no means trifling! I must seek a fitting opportunity, when in company with my friends, to turn the discourse upon royal espousals,

so that I may, as if quite casually and incidentally present the fruits of this present discovery."

Thus complacently musing, Sir Richard Mildmay closed the ponderous volume; and returning to the centre-table, he disposed of the remainder of the flask's contents. Then, having flung another half-sorrowful, half-admiring look upon the sword of the heroic Wallace, he bent his steps out of the armoury.

"Let us now hasten," he said to himself, "and see how matters progress in the audience-hall."

Thither he accordingly repaired; and he entered by one of the doors communicating therewith, just at the very moment when the whole assemblage was being electrified by the announcement from the lips of Father Julius, that the King of Scotland was wedded to Margaret Fitz-Allan. Then came the parting of the lattice-work of the gallery—the revelation of Margaret and her handmaidens to the spectators—and the loudly expressed invitation on the part of Sir Casimir D'Este, that those present would recognise their Queen in the lady towards whom every eye was now turned!

It would be indeed quite impossible to find language to express all the varied feelings which were in a moment conjured up by the startling announcements thus made. As a matter of course, the wildest astonishment was the prevailing sentiment: but in respect to individuals there were other feelings, which all in a moment flamed up as it were from the depths of the heart as gunpowder bursts into a blaze when the igniting spark reaches it. The King was for a while completely confounded,—feeling like one who had utterly overreached himself, with every energy paralyzed, and incapable of even reflecting whether he had a resource left. The Earl of Douglas—for a moment starting back in amazement when the announcement was made from his chaplain's lips—the next instant flung upon the King a look of fierce demoniacal triumph, muttering audibly, "By St. Jude! I can almost feel myself completely reconciled to my own fate, since I am not the only one who is enduring punishment now!"

The Earl of Caithness literally bounded from his seat in the gallery when the startling announcement was made; and then he murmured to himself, "Yes—it must be so! I comprehend it all now! The King's sojourn at Roslin Castle—Margaret's letter to Albertina when she fled—her declaration at Dalkeith that she would proclaim the name of her husband on this day and on this occasion,—all, all is explained!"

But what was the effect produced upon the Earl of Bassentyne? No sooner was the announcement made—and even while he was still starting with the wildest excitement—a light darted into his brain, just as if a revelation had all in a moment been made to him with the celerity of thought itself. He comprehended everything! His arrest—his captivity—Cochrane's treachery—all was now clear as daylight! Yes—and the spoliation of his person at the time of his arrest—the plunder of his jewels and valuables—was not this accomplished as a cover and gloss for the purpose of obtaining from him the ring which Margaret had given as a pledge of her love? Yes!—it was as if a veil had fallen from his eyes; it was as if a light had suddenly burst in upon him in some cavern where he had been previously groping his way in utter darkness! But Ah! then came the sickening thought that Margaret herself must have been either an accomplice or the instigatrix in respect to the foul wrongs which he had endured. Generous-hearted though he were—so magnanimous in disposition and so nobly forgiving—yet at the thought that he had

been thus treated his blood boiled in his veins. He could have resigned all pretensions to Margaret's hand in order to ensure her happiness, as the reader has seen that he was willing to do when in the oratory at Dalkeith; but to find that he had been so grossly trifled with and deceived—so duped and deluded—perhaps even made a convenience of, though he could not see how or why,—Oh! it was the idea of all this conduct on Margaret's part that now filled his soul with indignation. Thus, when the lattice-work fell apart, and revealed the form of Margaret in the gallery, the young Earl—almost beside himself, and utterly unable to retain the mastery over his actions—rushed forward and cleared a way amidst the throng until he reached the centre of the hall, whence he might look up and obtain a view of the false one whom he had loved so fondly. Terrible words of accusation were on the point of bursting forth from his lips, when he felt his arm suddenly clutched, and a voice said quickly in his ear, "Beware what you do, Lord Earl! or you will wound the innocent!"

Roland turned sharply round upon the individual who had thus spoken, and whose voice he fancied he at once recognised. Nor was he mistaken:—it was Stephen Cochrane.

"Villain!" he said, in a low deep concentrated tone: but there was little danger of his being overheard by any one save Cochrane himself—for though it was in the midst of a crowd that this little scene took place, yet such was the universal excitement which prevailed, and such the buzz of voices whispering in every direction, that no one was likely to bestow any interest on aught but the one grand engrossing subject.

"Call me villain, if you will, my lord," said Cochrane; "but beware how you breathe a syllable against the royal lady in yonder gallery: for on my soul! she was ignorant of all that befell you!"

"Is it indeed so?" asked the young Earl, now trembling with suspense: "dare I think that Margaret was after all incapable of so great a wrong towards me, and that when in the chapel of Dalkeith I proclaimed that I had endured a month's captivity, her amazement was not feigned?"

"Rest assured, my lord," responded Cochrane, "it was most real! Accuse her Majesty if you will—but I shall at once proclaim the whole truth,—namely, that I only am to be blamed for whatsoever treatment you have endured!"

Roland glanced up at Margaret; and it struck him that at the very moment her looks encountered his, and that the expression of her features was for an instant full of deprecation and entreaty, as if to beseech that he would still prove as magnanimous as he had already shown himself and that he would continue generous unto the end. He was disarmed—he could not feel it in his heart to do her an injury. He now believed that she was utterly innocent of any complicity in the treacherous proceedings which had been adopted towards him; and therefore the fiery indignation that had ere now taken possession of his soul was rapidly succumbing beneath the influence of this new belief. All the generosity and magnanimity of his love revived: all the chivalrous and self-sacrificing heroism of his character sprang into vitality again; and turning his looks hastily upon Cochrane, he said, "The matter then rests between you and me! Or perhaps the King is concerned likewise?"

The royal page gave no reply—but bowed, and then retreated amidst the throng, bowing his way back towards the neighbourhood of the dais, which he had only quitted for those few moments on happening to catch a glimpse of the Earl of Bassentyne clearing for himself a path through the assem-

blage with an ominous fury expressed upon his countenance. And now Cochrane muttered within himself, "Bassentyne will do no mischief!"

If we have found it difficult to convey an idea of the excitement which was occasioned by the proclamation of Margaret as Queen of Scotland,—still less easy would prove our task were we to endeavour to depict the feelings of Margaret herself. The whole of the concluding portion of the scene, from the point where Sir Casimir D'Este recommended the immediate marriage of the Earl of Douglas and the Lady Elvira—had hurried along as it were with incidents succeeding each other with whirlwind rapidity. The overruling by Sir Casimir of every one of the King's objections—the bringing forward of the witnesses for the contemplated bridal—first Redman, then Cochrane—and next the introduction of the priest—all these details had constituted a drama of the most thrilling interest as well as of a rapidly expanding significancy for the mind of Margaret. She saw that these were no random shots that were being fired—these were no hap-hazard occurrences that were so rapidly succeeding each other; but that all were links of a particular chain—the chain of her own destiny!

She had no time to conjecture how it could have been all brought about: she had not a moment to ask herself how Sir Casimir could have known one thing—done another—planned a third—devised a fourth—or in short, upon what grounds he had gone when settling and combining his whole scheme of operations. There was hurry in her brain,—but not the hurry of despair. Oh, no! it was the whirling, thrilling, onward-gushing feeling of wild hope and ecstatic anticipation. She knew not how the *denouement* was to be brought about, while still concealed by the lattice in front of the gallery. We cannot precisely say that she *waited* the issue of events: the more accurate explanation is that she suffered herself to be hurried along by them, as a person might in a joyous intoxication abandon himself to the hurrying eddies of a torrent, provided that there was the wild fervid hope that the careering waters would flow onward into the delicious gardens of Paradise itself. And then all in a moment the climax *did* come! After that rush of incidents—after that hurricane of startling occurrences, it came! Margaret beheld not that one or the two tirewomen suddenly touched a secret spring in the woodwork of the gallery: she had not time for a moment's reflection—what happened occupied no more space than the twinkling of an eye—the lattice-work fell—and Margaret found herself revealed to the gaze of the entire assemblage, while the Teutonic Knight exclaimed in a commanding tone, "Scots, behold your Queen!"

For a few instants Margaret felt as confused and bewildered as does the individual whom accident suddenly hurls from the ship's deck into the sea. All in a moment he is engulfed in waters that eddy around him: he is plunged into a liquid atmosphere of night, with the ocean singing and ringing, and roaring and thundering in his ears,—beating as it were upon the very brain—overwhelming reason itself, save and except with regard to *one* idea, the sense of the position itself—that sense being keenly vivid in the brain! So was it with Margaret: such were her sensations for the few brief instants which followed the abrupt giving way of the lattice-work. But as suddenly was it that her presence of mind returned: as abruptly was it that she was restored to the most perfect self-possession. She beheld Sir Casimir D'Este bending in courteous salutation from where he stood near the dais, when forth from his lips had gone those words, "Scots, behold your Queen!"

Then Margaret rose up to acknowledge the salutation of the Teutonic Knight; and powerful was the effect indeed which her appearance produced upon all present. Those who knew her, at once thought within themselves that they had never seen her look so grandly and strikingly handsome; while those persons who had previously been unacquainted with her, had the conviction suddenly forced upon them that she was indeed fitted to become Scotland's Queen. But still there was no very audible expression of feeling,—no shouts, no cries, no ejaculations of welcome. True, there was not a single voice raised in disapproval of the announcement that she was Scotland's Queen,—no hiss, no murmur; but on the other hand there was no swelling sound of rapturous applause. Silence—dead silence!—first of all the silence of an amazement which had the effect of awe itself—a wonderment that amounted almost to stupor! But the phase of excitement quickly succeeded: first a whisper was heard here—then a voice there—until at length there was the universal buzz to which we have before alluded, and in which low but many-tongued combination of sounds the colloquy betwixt the Earl of Bassentyne and Stephen Cochrane had been as it were absorbed.

Yet only minutes were passing, while we are taking a long time in our endeavour to describe the effect produced by the incidents with which the preceding chapter terminated. The King began to recover his self-possession. He gazed around him—he saw that it was not all a dream: he looked up into the gallery—he beheld the gloriously handsome countenance and superb form of Margaret; and it was now with a species of convulsive start that he attained the full command over his mental faculties. What was he to do? He now rapidly asked himself that question. Was he utterly overwhelmed? must he succumb to the force of circumstances? or should he still make a fight for it? He felt convinced that Margaret must have been a party to all these combinations against him. The idea was natural enough—he could not for an instant suppose that she herself had been hurried along by a series of events over which she had no control. He therefore looked upon her as a plotter and an enemy,—one who for the sake of her own ambition would trample upon every other consideration; and his soul was embittered against her.

"Sire," said the Earl of Douglas, bending lower before the King than ever he was previously known in all his life to do, so that it was easy to perceive that there was mockery in this proceeding, "it seems to be a fortunate day for the ladies, but a most inauspicious one for us of the sterner sex. I find myself saddled with a bride I never meant to take—and your Majesty must now proclaim the bride whom doubtless you never intended to acknowledge!"

There was a withering irony in his speech, which showed how capable the Black Douglas was of seizing upon an opportunity to wreak revenge on whosoever had offended him. The King started for a moment—bent a look of the most fiery indignation upon the Douglas—and then instantaneously regaining his presence of mind, he said in a voice that was clearly audible throughout the hall, and in accents which were utterly without tremulousness, "As you, my lord, have been upon your trial before me, and the result has been to give you the Lady Elvira as a bride, I will now put myself on trial before this august assemblage. My paladins and peers shall be my judges: it is indeed a matter for them to sift; and they shall pronounce whether there have been lawful and legitimate espousals between myself and the lady who claims to be my bride. By

the verdict of Scotland's nobles now gathered around me, will I shape my course; they shall pronounce the issue. It is for them therefore to decide whether Scotland doth indeed possess a Queen!"

Scarcely were these words spoken, when the utmost consternation prevailed throughout the assemblage; for the rumour had been whispered about and had spread like wildfire, that the building containing the audience-hall was surrounded by an immense force of Teutonic warriors who had made their appearance as if by magic—that their acting commander was Sir Fleming Fita-Allan, brother of the lady who claimed to be the Queen of Scotland—and that therefore death, immolation, and massacre might be regarded as in store for all who should dare to raise a voice against that lady's pretensions.

"The King is betrayed!" exclaimed a noble sycophant, who was devoted to David and was prepared to support the Royal cause in everything, whether right or wrong. "Scots! your King is a prisoner! Let him throw himself into the arms of his people!"

"Silence!" thundered the sonorous voice of Sir Casimir D'Este: "these are false words which are spoken! The Teutonic warriors have come by the King's invitation, and by virtue of special compact entered into by his Majesty of Scotland and his Highness Prince de Salza. Those troops shall support your King in everything that is right—but they assuredly shall sustain him in naught that is wrong! Be not apprehensive of violence on their part! Rest assured that they shall watch and wait until the matters now in progress be brought to an issue!"

"Sir Casimir D'Este speaks well," said the Earl of Caithness: "and I pledge my life for his honour and good faith."

A murmur of satisfaction greeted these words, for all knew the strict integrity of the nobleman from whose lips they flowed.

"Let the proceedings," said the Teutonic Knight, "assume the aspect which his Majesty King David has willed that they should take!—let it be a trial which is about to ensue! It shall not be supposed at the outset that the King seeks to repudiate his wife, if wife she be. But if on her side there be failure to prove that there were lawful and legal espousals, then shall it be held that the King acted well and wisely in submitting her pretensions to this tribunal: whereas if on the other hand the lady's case should be fully proven, and it shall be shown that the espousals were in every detail lawful and legitimate, then you have your King's word solemnly pledged that he will abide by the verdict that may be pronounced accordingly!"

Ejaculations of "Well spoken! bravely reasoned! deftly argued!" and other cries of approval emanated from various parts of the hall, so that it was now considered definitely settled that a species of new trial was to be entered upon—namely, to decide whether Margaret's claim to be recognised as Queen of Scotland were a valid one or a mere unfounded pretension.

CHAPTER LII.

THE TRIAL OF MARGARET'S CLAIMS.

THE King had by this time recovered his perfect self-possession, and he was thoroughly master of all his ideas. The train in which his thoughts were rapidly flowing during Sir Casimir D'Este's speech may be thus described:—



"Ah! you think, Sir Casimir, that the cause which you have chosen to advocate is already as good as won! You are mistaken! Granting that it was really a priest who joined our hands at the altar, and that Cochrane basely deceived me—or else that he was deceived by Redman—or that both were deceived by some deep-laid plot whereof the Douglas may have been at the bottom—for his chaplain the fellow appears to be,—granting, I say, that he is a veritable priest, it is still no marriage! For Margaret is a traitress—attainted and under ban for the treason of her ancestor—excluded from all civil rights—incompetent to enjoy whatsoever advantages the country's laws or religious ceremonies may be calculated to afford to other persons. Ah! Ah! Sir Casimir! you know not this! How can you? Margaret would not have told you. No! she would have perished sooner! Fleming would not have told you. No! he would have dreaded lest you should recall the command of the troops which you entrusted to him! The Earl of Caithness would not tell you—it is a secret which he would not dare to breathe, seriously compromised as he himself would become! Then you, Sir Casimir, are now working in the dark, and toiling only to find that your labour shall be presently undone! Let matters progress! let mine enemies find their hopes go on exalting themselves!—I will dash them all down in the end! That at least is a last resource. Yes!—it is the one to which I must appeal—though would to heaven that the necessity existed not!"

It was in some such strain as this that the Monarch's thoughts flowed onward; and confidently bugging the belief that he had Margaret completely in his power, he glanced furtively up at her, at the same time silently apostrophizing her thus:—

"Ah! to what mad projects hast thou abandoned thyself! To what disastrous lengths is thine insane ambition bringing thee! Gloriously handsome as thou art, I could have adored thee as a mistress; but thou shalt not be forced upon me as a wife! Much do I marvel what is now passing within thy brain! Art thou confident of success?—art thou ignorant that being under the ban of the law—a bearer of the proscribed name of Logie—thou canst form no legal contract upon Scottish soil? In fine, thou art an outlaw—beyond the pale of every statute conferring benefits, but within the range of every enactment inflicting penalties! Foolish, foolish Margaret! how is it that thou hast thus suffered ambition to hurry thee on headlong to thy ruin? And not only ruin for thyself—but ruin for thy brother likewise! Yes—truly thou must be ignorant of the actual position in which thou dost stand!"

We have recorded these musings of the King in order to show the reader in what mood of mind it was that he entered upon the proceedings, which had taken their turn almost entirely from his own suggestion; because, be it recollected, he felt perfectly safe in the course which he had thus pointed out. He knew very well that the Earl of Douglas and some of his partisan nobles would be sure to advocate the cause of Margaret, for the mere sake of demonstrating their hostility towards himself; but he calculated for an immense majority for his own side, formed of those peers and paladins whom he knew, or at least believed, to be strenuously devoted to his person. Besides, he felt so confident that the one grand last resource which he had in store, must strike such a blow that it could be only the veriest partisanship of hostility which would dare to resist such an overwhelming fact as that Margaret was attainted as a traitress in the eye of the law, and therefore unable to contract any legal

marriage on the Scottish soil, even though it were with the humblest of his subjects. In order, therefore, to give the utmost semblance of fair play to the proceedings,—and conceiving himself to be too strong in his own position to pause for the purpose of considering what Sir Casimir D'Este's motives might be in taking a part against him—and perhaps somewhat with the hope of still cajoling the Teutonic Knight over to his side, for he scarcely believed in the strict unpurchaseable integrity of any man,—David said in a loud firm voice, "And now, Sir Casimir, since you have borne a prominent part in the proceedings of this day—and have doubtless most conscientiously so borne yourself—it were well if you were to act as judge-advocate and assessor in the conduct of whatsoever investigation is to ensue."

"Believe me, sire," responded the Knight, with a courteous but dignified inclination, which made the forest of crimson plumes wave and toss above his helmet, thereby adding to the grandeur and loftiness of his bearing,—“believe me, sire, that whatsoever is entrusted to my supervision, shall be conducted in accordance with the strictest principles of justice and integrity."

"I expected naught else," said the King, who, with the infatuation peculiar to monarchs accustomed to overawe or to cajole, beheld in this response a tendency to come over to his side,—“I expected naught else from the representative of the high and mighty Prince de Salza, Grand Master of the honourable and religious Order of the Teutons."

Again the warrior bowed—but this time somewhat more distantly and haughtily, as if he either suspected the insidious motive of the compliment, or as if he were loftily indifferent to it.

"And now," said the King, not perceiving the difference in the Knight's demeanour, "let us enter upon these proceedings. In the first place, it will be needful for this person"—pointing to Father Julius—"who aspires to the consideration of a holy father of the Church, to prove that he is such."

"That, sire, can I most readily do," said Father Julius. "Here be certificates from those high dignitaries under whose auspices I was duly inducted into the ministry."

Father Julius produced the papers of which he spoke; and the Secretary of State stepped forward to examine them. In a few moments he pronounced that they were completely satisfactory.

"It was a mere matter of form," said the King, again inwardly wondering whether Cochrane had wilfully deceived him in substituting a veritable priest for a creature who, according to the understanding at the time, was to have been dressed up in canonicals for the purpose of a mock-marriage. "That point is settled: let us proceed to the next. The witnesses of the alleged ceremony must step forward to give their testimony."

"Lieutenant Redman of Roslin Castle!" exclaimed the Teutonic Knight.

"I am here," was the answer: and now the mass of the audience began to marvel that this individual should have been selected by Sir Casimir as a witness for the marriage-ceremony between the Earl of Douglas and the Lady Elvira Ramsay.

"What know you of the case at issue?" inquired Sir Casimir.

"I know, Sir Knight," responded Redman, "that on the evening of the fifth of June, of the year of our Lord now current, I was witness to the espousals of his Majesty the King of Scotland, and of the lady who at the time was known as Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan."

"Did you affix your signature to any document to this effect?" asked Sir Casimir D'Este.

"Assuredly, Sir Knight," rejoined Redman. "I signed my name—for I have this much of clerly accomplishment—to the marriage-certificate duly drawn up by his reverence:"—and he indicated Father Julius.

"The next witness," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "is your Majesty's own confidential servitor—one Stephen Cochrane by name."

"Confidential?" said the King, somewhat petulantly. "By St. Andrew! that is as it may be! Howbeit, let Stephen Cochrane stand forward, and proclaim what he may have to state in these proceedings."

While the audience was again lost in wonder at the summoning of such a witness, the royal page advanced from the midst of the group near the dais; and bowing low, he said with a certain subdued humility of manner, "May it please your Majesty, I am here on this solemn occasion to speak the truth without respect of persons. I say then, as the Lieutenant Redman hath already said—though I will shape my words in a style somewhat more befitting the august presence in which I stand—that I had the honour of being chosen by your Highness as one of the witnesses of your Majesty's nuptials with the lady who at the time bore the denomination of Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan. And to avoid unnecessary delay, I will humbly yet truthfully add that your poor servitor's obscure name figured on the same certificate to which allusion has been made."

"Tis well," said the King. "Then the certificate must be forthcoming,—without which, as all men know, whatsoever hath been advanced would go for naught:"—and there was still a lingering hope in the Monarch's mind that the document had been destroyed by Father Julius—in which case he (the King) would be spared the necessity of having recourse to that last expedient, which, for the reasons he had developed to the Countess of Morten, he was loath to be compelled to fall back upon.

It was likewise a very anxious moment for Margaret, and a suspenseful one for the great mass of the assemblage: but the period of anxiety was not long—for Sir Casimir D'Este, producing a slip of parchment, said, "Here is the certificate."

There was a visible sensation throughout the audience-hall. Margaret experienced a feeling of infinite relief—the King looked blank for a moment, and could not prevent himself from biting his lip with vexation; while the Earl of Douglas flung around him a look of malignant satisfaction to mark how things were going against the cause of the Monarch.

"I presume, sire," said Sir Casimir D'Este, "that the investigation is now complete—that the espousals are fully proven in their legality and legitimacy——"

"Stop!" exclaimed a voice; and it was the voice of one who had hitherto taken no part in the proceedings. "With his Grace's permission, I have certain matters to bring forward,—which will, I think, without the undue presumption of superior knowledge, give another complexion to these transactions."

Then, having elbowed his way through the crowd, Sir Richard Mildmay advanced with mincing gait—with a jaunty and debonair demeanour—and evidently with no small idea of the importance of the part he was performing. Every one who knew him was surprised at his interference, for they wondered what on earth he could have to say in the matter; while those who were unacquainted with him, speedily ascertained from their neighbours who he

was. The King, judging from his character and from his speech, that he had something favourable to his own cause to communicate, exclaimed in an affable tone, "What! my good Sir Richard? have you ought to advance at the present juncture?"

"Yes—may it please your Majesty," returned the Knight. "And that there may be no unnecessary parlance and no unseemly delay, I have to request that your Grace will forthwith order the mighty volume of statutes and records kept in the armoury of this castle, to be brought into your august presence."

The King at once nodded to the warder of the armoury, who was amongst the officials standing in the neighbourhood of the throne; and that functionary hastened away to execute the command thus conveyed to him. Again was there a most anxious interval of suspense for Margaret in the gallery, and of wonderment on the part of the mass of spectators, as to what this new incident would produce. The Earl of Douglas looked dubious—the Earl of Caithness was alarmed lest something should develop itself hostile to Margaret's interests: the countenance of Sir Casimir D'Este was coldly and haughtily inscrutable.

"Forasmuch as your humble servant, sire," said Sir Richard Mildmay, balancing himself with a jaunty self-complacency on his lean legs, "hath somewhat more of scholarship than usually falls to the lot of personages beyond the pale of a clerly sphere—in which accomplishment I do nothing vainly arrogate to myself, but for the same am rather inclined to experience gratitude towards a certain Father Boniface, who in the period of my youth did by means of sundry and divers thwacks over my head and shoulders, and other parts to which I need not more explicitly allude in this fair company, inculcate matters of reading and writing,—I find myself gifted with a researchful spirit into books whensoever they fall in my way. Now, as I will presently show——"

"Good Sir Richard," interrupted the King, "we all give you credit for your learning. I beseech you to enlighten us in respect to the object for which you have sent for the book of statutes."

"It shall soon be made manifest to your Highness and this fair company," responded the old Knight, "that there is a certain unrepealed law which is especially pertinent to the various points now at issue. It will be found at page eighty-seven of the mighty volume which is to be brought here incontinently; and the statute itself was enacted in the year 1107, being the first of the reign of his august Majesty Alexander I, son of the great King Malcolm Canmore."

"In good sooth," interjected David, "this is correct historic lore so far as royal names are concerned. But what saith the statute—of which, as I have a soul to be saved, I have no knowledge?"

"Here is the volume itself, sire," exclaimed Sir Richard Mildmay, as the warder entered with the book.

Great was the excitement of suspense which now prevailed; and our readers can better imagine than we can describe the varied feelings which must have animated the principal actors in the present scene, according to the different sides in which their sympathies were respectively enlisted. The warder placed the book upon a small table, which he wheeled forward in front of the dais; and Sir Richard Mildmay at once took possession of it.

"Now, sire," he said, "I turn in the first instance to page eighty-seven—which behold! Here, in legible characters—and be it parenthetically observed that every page is not equally clear,—but

here, I say, we have a statute applying to Royal Marriages; and forasmuch as there is no line of erasure drawn across the same, it is a proof, according to the mode of keeping this book of records, that the law in question has never been repealed nor abrogated. The preamble sets forth—

"Spare us the preamble, Sir Knight," interrupted the King, who could scarcely cover his impatience with the maintenance of a becoming dignity; "and get at once to the point to which you would fain direct our attention."

"Good, sire," said Sir Richard. "Permit me to shape the matter in the form of a question. I would ask, then, if within the period of a month of thirty-one days from the date which that alleged certificate of marriage bears, it has been deposited for signature at the Chancery of Scotland, according to the rule and regulation laid down by this statute,—and in default of compliance with which rule and regulation such certificate shall be held null and void?"

It were needless to say that immense was the sensation which now prevailed in the audience-hall; but we may observe that the colour went and came in such rapid transitions upon Margaret's cheeks for the space of a few moments, that Maude and the tirewomen, seriously alarmed, held themselves ready to catch her in case she should faint. As for the King, he was also a prey to the most painful suspense,—hope however predominating over his fear.

"Behold!" exclaimed Sir Casimir, displaying the slip of parchment. "The name of the Chancellor of the Kingdom is written on the back thereof!—and the date which the signature bears is the fourth of July. That was yesterday. The date of the certificate is the fifth of June; and consequently the counter-signature of the Chancellor was appended *within* the period fixed by the statute."

Another immense relief for Margaret!—and she felt the kind-hearted Maude pressing her hand for a moment in congratulation. Let the reader rest assured that this pressure was returned, accompanied by a look of affectionate significancy. Every successive step in the solemn but exciting ordeal progressed in Margaret's favour;—and no wonder that it was exciting! for a game of thrilling interest was being played, and the stake was a queenly diadem!

"Is that all, Sir Richard?" asked the King, almost angrily, as if absolutely unable to prevent himself from venting his vexation upon the old Knight as being the first who came under his eye at the moment.

"No, sire—it is not all," answered Mildmay, with a tone of assurance: "the most important condition is yet behind—and verily I see not how it could possibly have been complied with. Listen! The statute here before me decrees that no princess, lady, or other female, whom a crowned King of Scotland may think of making his wedded wife, shall be entitled lawfully to share the throne, enjoy regal privileges, or be saluted with the homage due to a Queen, unless some independent king, potentate, or prince, shall either have stood as her godfather at the altar at the time of the marriage, or within a period of thirty-one days from the date of such marriage shall have inscribed his name upon the nuptial-certificate, so that a document worthy of such high proceedings may be deposited amongst the archives of the kingdom."

Words have no power to convey an idea of the sensation produced by the enunciation of this clause of the statute,—a statute, which though old to the extent of two centuries and a half, was nevertheless unrepealed and therefore in full force. Tremendous

was the revulsion of feeling on Margaret's part: her heart sank completely within her—she became deadly pale—and it was only by the strongest effort arising from feminine pride which would not show how utterly she was discomfited, that she saved herself from falling back into the arms of her attendants. The Earl of Caithness gave vent to a low moan: the Earl of Bassentyne's generous heart melted with compassion on behalf of her whom he had loved so well. The King, feeling himself triumphantly victorious, literally bounded upon his throne:—the countenance of the Earl of Douglas fell completely, as in fierce rage he muttered to himself,—"After all, there is no humiliation for David!"

"Methinks," said Sir Richard Mildmay, who now had visions of a peerage and all imaginable honours dancing before his eyes in recompense for the service he was rendering the King,—"*methinks that 'tis* is a condition imperatively ordained by the statute with which it will be somewhat difficult to comply!"

"Hah! say you so?" exclaimed the commanding sonorous voice of Sir Casimir D'Este. "Behold!"—and snatching up a pen from the table, he wrote his name across the back of the certificate.

"What ho! Sir Knight!" cried the King, in a tone of mingled anger and irony: "this will not serve the purpose! The statute is specific—at least so I understand it! You may be the representative of Teutonic Royalty: but that will not suffice! It must be Royalty's own signature that endorses this document to render it valid!"

Indescribable was the noble and chivalrous animation which appeared upon the countenance of the Teutonic warrior, as he drew his fine form up to the full of its grand and stately height,—appearing to dominate by his regards every soul within that hall, not even excepting the King of Scotland himself.

"And it is Royalty's signature," he exclaimed, "which is now affixed to that document! It is not the name which for my own purposes I chose to bear when coming into your realm:—it is the name by which throughout the world its writer is best known! For I am Prince de Salza."

Then, while a tremendous excitement and sensation prevailed within the audience-hall, one of the side-doors was burst open; and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, followed by some twenty red-scarfed warriors, entered upon the scene, so that a fitting body-guard might be at hand to do honour to his Highness the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights.

CHAPTER LIIL

PRINCE DE SALZA.

It seemed to the assemblage as if heaven itself were actually fighting the battle of Margaret. Step by step did her cause appear to be progressing towards the completest triumph!—step by step was the discomfiture of the King apparently growing more and more certain! It were vain to make the slightest attempt to depict the wild feelings of ecstatic delight which succeeded the first shock of wonderment,—for a shock it veritably was,—that struck Margaret as the great Teutonic leader revealed himself. We have said that a tremendous excitement and sensation prevailed within the audience-hall: but we can no more find language to convey an adequate idea of this sensation than we can discover befitting terms to describe the feelings of

Margaret. The whole scene was perhaps one of the most affecting, and yet at the same time one of the most solemnly interesting, that ever had taken place. The world was full of the renown of the mighty Prince de Salza, who had done so much to consolidate the power, strengthen the influence, and extend the range of the Teutonic dominion on Continental Europe. The tongue of Fame had for years past been loud in proclaiming the high merits of the Grand Master as a warrior:—defeat he had never sustained, but it was ever to conquest that he had led on his heroic people; and the results of his triumphs were seen in the addition of provinces, and cities, and towns to the vast territory over which his sovereignty extended. This then was the man who had now proclaimed himself in that audience-hall!—this was the illustrious chief who had just thrown off, as it were, the mask which for a time it had suited him to wear!—this was the independent potentate who held a prominent place amongst the rulers of mankind, and whose sword constituted the most powerful sceptre of the age!

The reader must picture to himself the scene which we have attempted to describe,—how amazement at first smote the entire assemblage of spectators—how admiration speedily kindled in the eyes of all those Scots who, valorous themselves, adored valour when personified in others—and how the effect of the entire proceedings was enhanced when the door burst open and the guard of Teutonic warriors entered the hall. Then Margaret beheld her brother at the head of that guard; and she was scarcely astonished:—indeed, after the grand surprise which had burst upon her, she felt as if she could no longer be amazed at anything; while she was almost smitten with a superstitious idea in reference to the wondrous power and resources of the Prince de Salza. We should find a moment's leisure to observe that the Earl of Caithness experienced an indescribable joy on seeing that Margaret's cause was again triumphantly in the ascendant and progressing most favourably: indeed there was not a scintillation of a lingering uneasiness in his mind; for he was ignorant that Margaret had confided to the King the secret of her birth and that the Monarch knew that she bore the proscribed name of Logie! As for the Earl of Bassentyne, his generous heart was deep in its sympathies with Margaret's cause; and we should add that both the Earls felt proud of the intimacy which they had enjoyed with the great warrior whom they had hitherto known only by the humbler denomination of Sir Casimir D'Este, but who now proved to be one of the Sovereign Princes of Christendom.

And how felt the Black Douglas? So soon as he recovered from the shock of wonderment which struck himself as well as all others present, he experienced a feeling of delight that the tables should have turned so completely and definitely (as it appeared) against the King. The Douglas was a man of peculiar character. His passions were often as eccentric as they were violent—as singular in the phases which they presented as they were lawless in their own operation. Thus, on the present occasion, the governing idea of the Black Earl was to espouse the cause which was opposed to that of the King. It was now nothing to him that Margaret was the sister of that same Fleming Fitz-Allan who had conquered him in the lists at Roslin Castle, and who had succeeded him as lord of Hermitage:—it was nothing to the Earl of Douglas that if the sister were acknowledged as a Queen the brother must necessarily become one of the principal personages in the realm. The Douglas had for the moment no other consideration than that of seeking revenge for the *last* injury which,

according to his own belief, he had sustained. This last injury was the infliction of Elvira as a wife; and it was the King who had decreed the sentence. Therefore, so long as the King was humiliated, the Douglas would feel happy for the moment, and he would not care if all his other enemies were triumphant. Such was his disposition;—and the reader may therefore imagine with what a fierce malignant joy, with what a spiteful gleaming, and with what a vindictive sense of satisfaction, the Douglas hailed this last turn in the proceedings, which he supposed must utterly crush and overwhelm the cause of the King.

But how felt David himself?—how acted he? what demeanour did he wear? and what was his policy? Like all the rest on whose ears burst the astounding words, “I am Prince de Salza!” the King was seized with amazement: but he, more speedily perhaps than any other, recovered a certain degree of self-possession—for he was accustomed to tutor his emotions and discipline his feelings, so far at least as the outward betrayal of them was concerned. Then he became all at once ready to perform the part of the Scottish King,—dignified and courteous—hospitable towards a foreign potentate whom he must now perhaps look upon as his guest—yet resolved to display a spirit of independence in the presence of his subjects, and repudiate as it were any undue influence which the Teutonic Prince might seek to wield over him. This was David's policy; while his resolution was likewise taken in respect to the most important subject of the day's proceedings.

Rising from his throne, King David descended the steps of the dais, and advanced with extended hand towards the Prince de Salza,—saying, with a blended dignity and courtesy, “Your Highness is welcome upon the Scottish soil. That same welcome do I repeat to the master and the principal, which I gave when believing you to be simply the representative of Teutonic Majesty. As a brother-potentate, I should be justified in reproaching your Highness for coming in disguise, as it were, within the limits of my kingdom, and in such style that I deemed it not needful to offer to place a palace at your disposal. But now the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights will become the welcome guest of David of Scotland!”

Prince de Salza—for we may now no longer use that name of Casimir D'Este which had become so familiar to the reader,—Prince de Salza, we say, took the King's hand; and there they stood as equals, that independent ruler of the Teutons and Caledonia's monarch!

“Accept my thanks, sire and brother,” answered Prince de Salza, thus adopting the formula of language which was usual between royal personages, “for the courteous terms in which you have addressed me. Your Majesty is aware that the Teutonic Order contains citizens of all countries and emigrants from all climes. Long absence from Scotland, as well as the habit of speaking another language during this protracted interval, has doubtless given to my speech that foreign accent which would prevent hearers from judging at once, by my discourse, of the land to which I owe my birth. Thus I may have seemed to be a foreigner having a more than usually perfect acquaintance with the language spoken on this soil. Nevertheless,” added Prince de Salza, his voice trembling for an instant with some inward emotion, “I owe my nativity to no alien clime—the place of my birth exists not upon the Continent of Europe—it was to the beams which the sun shed upon Caledonia's face that my eyes first opened in this world—and though wielding the sceptre of a mighty dominion on a

foreign soil, yet in my heart am I proud to belong to the land whose glory is illustrated by the deeds of a William Wallace and a Robert Bruce."

The respect which the presence of Royalty imposed,—Royalty as it now existed there in two forms—alone prevented a tremendous outburst of applause on account of this speech of Prince de Salza. As it was, however, an immense sensation was produced, and a murmur of approval ran through the vast assemblage. Many a Scottish heart then swelled with pride at the fact which had been announced; for it was indeed most flattering to the patriotic feelings of the Scotch people that it was their own nation which had given birth to the foremost warrior of the age!

"Right welcome to my ears," said King David, "is the intelligence which your Highness has just vouchsafed; and in thus speaking, it is not merely as an individual, but as the representative of all Scotland itself. Yet surely, sire and brother, it must have been from some goodly stock that you were sprung?—perchance one of those families from whom valour is inseparable and with whom warfare is, so to speak, an hereditary pastime. May I without indiscretion ask what name was once borne in Scotland before that which your Highness now bears, and which has been illustrated by such deeds of the loftiest emprise?"

"It were scarcely worth while," responded the Teutonic Prince, "to go back to the earlier period of my existence. Suffice it to say, sire and brother, that the period to which I allude was marked by misfortunes and had a gloomy shade thrown upon it."

"Ah, pardon me, sire," exclaimed David, assuming a look and tone of courteous sympathy. "I have been indiscreet enough to touch upon chords which vibrate painfully—"

"Offer no excuses, sire," interrupted Prince de Salza. "The question your Majesty put was natural, and you could not foresee that the topic might be a disagreeable one. And yet, believe me, it is through no sentiment of pride that I endeavour to divert my regards from the earlier years of my existence. No!—on the contrary, a man who instead of having been born to empire, has created empire for himself, may well be supposed to look back with satisfaction upon the career which has been accomplished, and he may glory all the more fervently in proportion to the obscurity of that origin from which he has raised himself. Therefore, sire, with me it is no vain nor frivolous sentiment of pride which places a seal upon my lips when asked in reference to my origin. But there are other considerations—"

"I beseech your Highness not to dwell upon the subject," interjected King David. "Ah, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan!" he exclaimed, now affecting to behold our young hero for the first time since he entered at the head of the body-guard which had drawn itself up in a line a few paces behind Prince de Salza: "how fares it with you, Sir Knight? I perceive that you have entered upon that high and important command which some few weeks ago was by anticipation conferred upon you, and concerning which there now need exist no secrecy."

Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan—who had been duly informed of everything which had taken place in the audience-hall previous to his entrance thither—bowed with a somewhat distant and haughty courtesy to the King, at the same time saying in a low tone, so that his words might not be generally audible, "While I have been prepared to expend all my energies and to shed my blood even unto the very last drop in the service of your Majesty,—you, sire, have been seeking to throw dishonour upon my sister!"

"Not so, Sir Knight," responded the King, drawing himself up with the loftiest hauteur. "It is honour to a lady to win the love of a monarch, even though that love be not sanctioned by the bridal formulas in their legal and legitimate sense."

The flush of indignation glowed upon the handsome countenance of Fleming Fitz-Allan, as he answered, "Did circumstances render it necessary, I should repel with ire and abhorrence such a doctrine, if it were applied to my sister. But it is needless to moot the point, inasmuch as every barrier which opposed her recognition as your Grace's wife and as Scotland's Queen, has been thrown down. For I much doubt whether that researcher after ancient legal lore—and the youth glanced contemptuously at Sir Richard Mildmay—"can adduce any fresh objection or hindrance, or ferret out any new condition to be fulfilled."

"In good sooth," said Sir Richard, who looked terribly crestfallen, and from whose brain all visions of peerages, honours, and titles had vanished away, "there was a startling succession of what may be termed providential incidents: for who could possibly have foreseen that no sooner was a condition made known than it should be found to have been fulfilled, and that no sooner did a mighty requirement arise than there was a personage present to answer it? But you, Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, must bear me no ill-will—for I acted not through malignant wickedness, nor in evil feeling against the royal lady who is your sister, and unto whom homage must now be done as Scotland's Queen."

"Rest assured, Sir Richard," answered Fleming, who in the generosity of his heart pitied the trembling and quaking old Knight, "neither my sister nor myself will bear you any rancour.—And now, sire," continued our hero, again turning towards the Scottish King, "permit me to remind your Majesty that after wrong has been done, the sooner it is righted—"

"Full well do I comprehend the drift of your thoughts, Sir Fleming," interrupted the King, with a certain haughty curtness: "but matters cannot progress at the speed which you would fain impart to them. Moreover, your individual interference begins to savour of discourtesy towards your King—"

"A brother, sire," interjected Prince de Salza, with a look of dignified reproach, "may well be pardoned for any fervour which he may display in espousing the cause of a sister. But enough on that point! Your Grace was ere now pleased to refer to me as judge and assessor in the solemn proceedings of this tribunal—for a tribunal, so to speak, it has become. I presume, sire, that the same office which you confided to me as Sir Casimir D'Este, may still be exercised with good faith and discretion by me as Prince de Salza?"

"Assuredly so," answered King David, with a most courteous tone. "What ho, my attendants there! Set a chair upon the dais—on a level with mine own! Yes—there! on the right hand! 'Tis well!—Sire and brother, do me the favour to occupy this seat, and let us hasten to bring these proceedings to a termination."

Prince de Salza took the seat which had just been placed upon the dais in obedience to David's mandate; and the latter monarch resumed his own throne-like chair.

"Yes, assuredly," said David, as if continuing in a current of thought which had not been broken off,—“the office of judge and assessor remains with your Highness; and it is more than ever honoured by being vested in the hands of one bearing the

high name which you have ere now made known. For full well am I aware that if as Sir Casimir D'Este you would have borne yourself with all honourable fairness and judicial integrity,—so more than ever, if possible, would you as a Sovereign-Prince yourself—the judge of judges—study to conduct these proceedings to their most proper issue.”

“Yes—your Grace only does me justice by the enunciation of such a sentiment,” answered Prince de Salza, with a calm dignity.

“And you will bear in mind, sire and brother,” proceeded the King, “that this is not an ungenerous warfare which I am waging against the lady in yon gallery; but it is the trial of a case wherein all Scotland must be deeply interested. Therefore, whatsoever my own private affections and feelings may be, they assuredly ought to be put out of the question. In a word, sire, it is for this august assemblage to decide, under your righteous and impartial influence, whether in every requisite detail, even the minutest, the lady makes good her right and establishes her claim to be regarded as Scotland’s Queen?”

“Methinks, sire and brother,” answered Prince de Salza, still maintaining the most perfect composure and self-possession,—“methinks there must be something in your mind to the enunciation of which all that your Grace has just been saying is intended but as the preface. Now, if this be so, it were well that your Highness should speak out at once, in order that there may be an end to suspense on the part of the assemblage.”

“The Prince does not speak of an end to suspense on *your* part likewise, dear lady,” whispered Maude to Margaret; “for he is evidently assured that naught now can alter your position, and that the King must end by the performance of his duty.”

“Ah, my dear girl!” replied Margaret, also in a whisper, “methought ere now that everything had terminated favourably, and that Prince de Salza’s signature was the last condition that could possibly be required in the form of a preliminary to my acknowledgment as Scotland’s Queen. But I now perceive there is something still behind! There is something in the King’s mind—I like not his manner—there is about him that calm assurance which bodes me no good—”

Here Margaret suddenly stopped short, for Prince de Salza—after some further conversation with the King, which was carried on in an undertone—proclaimed in a loud voice that the proceedings were about to be resumed. All therefore was again anxiety and suspense; for it was generally seen that there were yet farther preliminaries to be settled ere Margaret’s claims could be acknowledged as valid; and those who knew the Scottish Monarch well, judged, as Margaret had done, that his Majesty had still some resource in the background on which he relied for an escape from the false position in which he seemed to be placed.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE DECISION.

It was the King himself who first spoke after that proclamation from the lips of the Grand Master of the Touts in reference to the renewal of the proceedings.

“And now, Prince,” he said, addressing his speech to De Salza, though raising his voice so that it might be clearly audible throughout the audience-hall, “let us have some little brief re-

capitulation. In the first place Father Julius has proven that he is a duly accredited priest of the most holy Catholic Church, and therefore fitted to celebrate nuptial ceremonies. Secondly, there were the witnesses Cochrane and Redman, who gave their evidence with an impartiality which under all circumstances cannot be held otherwise than as commendable. Thirdly, the marriage-certificate was produced. Fourthly, it was shown to have been timeously entered amongst the royal archives and to that effect attested by the Chancellor of our realm. Lastly, the document has been honoured by the autograph of a Sovereign Prince; and assuredly no espousals were ever sanctioned by a higher name than that of the illustrious potentate whom I now address. Thus far every condition has been fulfilled and every requirement answered.”

The King was studiously intending to create a most favourable impression by the seeming fairness with which he was recapitulating past proceedings. Prince de Salza however was evidently not the man to be taken off his guard by the gloss of justice which his compeer-potentate endeavoured to throw over his own share in the transaction; and with a somewhat haughty bow, the Grand Master said, “Your Majesty has stated every detail with pointed accuracy. What subject is now to be brought forward?”

“There have been certain whisperings breathed in my ears—no matter from what source,” resumed David, speaking in grave and deliberate tones,—“which whisperings were to an effect that must now be loudly proclaimed. I will put a case, Prince de Salza. What if it be shown that the lady who claims to be my bride, and therewith advances pretensions to be recognised as Queen of Scotland,—what, I ask, if this lady be, unfortunately for herself, labouring under certain legal disabilities incapacitating her from contracting a marriage that shall be legitimate and binding upon the Scottish soil?”

A strong sensation pervaded the assembly as these last words were spoken. Margaret became pale as death: she gasped—she endeavoured to speak—but her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth; and Maude pressed her hand with a vehemence that was both affectionate and affrighted, though the amiable girl knew not to what subject the King’s remarks could possibly point. Margaret however at once suspected; and she was rendered alike indignant and aghast, dismayed and horrified, by this new proof of her royal husband’s black perfidiousness. The Earl of Caithness likewise comprehended the matter; and he trembled, for he knew how fearfully he was compromised by having reared, harboured, and befriended the branded Logies, brother and sister. Fleming was equally keen-witted in fathoming what was in the King’s mind:—for a moment the hand of the impetuous youth was ready to seek his sword to cut the traitorous Monarch down—but he commanded his temper, and the movement was too imperceptible to be noticed. As for Prince de Salza, he simply said in his calm imperturbable manner, “If your Majesty can prove all that you have stated, there is of course an end to the lady’s claims and pretensions.”

Yet was there something in that very calmness and imperturbability which prevented Margaret from abandoning herself to utter despair—though she murmured within her own bosom, “If the Grand Master can help me now, he will be like an angel sent from heaven!”

“It requires no practised jurist,” resumed the King, “to convince this assemblage of the truth of that which I am about to enunciate; and I am all the better pleased that you, sire and brother, should be a native of this our Scottish land, inasmuch as

your Highness will know well the tenour of these our Scottish laws. To be brief, then, the statutes proclaim that no person belonging to a proscribed and attainted family against whom pains and penalties have been fulminated, may contract any legal bargain or contract, whether civil or religious. It is a painful duty which I have to perform—but it is my devoir to Scotland that I am fulfilling: and this is to declare," added David, raising his voice to a high pitch, "that the lady whose claims are now under consideration, bears not properly the name of Fitz-Allan! Her name—the name she has derived from her ancestors—is Logie!"

This was a day for all the variations and transitions of excitement and suspense, dismay, and stupefaction, wonderment, and surprise, which could possibly be produced in the keenest intensity of those feelings or sentiments. But it was now not the least of these sensations that was inspired by the King's words. Prince de Salza's penetrating eye caught at a glance the movement which Fleming again made to seize upon his sword-hilt; and he therefore hastened to wave his hand imperiously, exclaiming, "Peace and silence everywhere! The matter shall be rightly investigated!"

Then a profound stillness reigned throughout the audience-hall; and this was broken at the expiration of a minute by the Prince de Salza, who said to the King, "Your Grace has rightly interpreted the Scottish law. But there is likewise a law which declares that the monarch can pardon; and if previous to the marriage-ceremony the words of forgiveness went forth from your Majesty's lips, then is that ceremony still valid and binding, and the lady's claims are well founded."

"I believe, Prince," answered David, with a look of the completest assurance, "that no one will dare stand forward to avow—"

"One moment, sire!" interjected the Grand Master: "there is some one here present who can throw a light upon this matter! Stephen Cochrane, step forth!"

Margaret was on the very point of proclaiming from the gallery, in tones of burning indignation, that the words of forgiveness had been uttered prior to the marriage-ceremony, when she suddenly restrained herself as Prince de Salza with such calm dignity broke in upon the Monarch's perfidiously intended denial. Amidst a breathless suspense Stephen Cochrane stood forward: he placed himself in front of the dais—and he bowed low to the two potentates. The King felt desperately uneasy, though his countenance betrayed nothing: yet within his own mind he asked himself, "What can this vile traitor now be about to advance? what can he possibly know? Is he suborned to commit perjury?"

"State whatsoever you may have to communicate," said the Grand Master of the Teutons, "in reference to the point now at issue."

Stephen Cochrane again bowed low; and then he said, with a voice and look of contrite humility as before, "May it please your Highness, I am here to speak the truth. I do remember that on the night when the nuptials took place, his gracious Majesty of Scotland first of all met Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan, as she was then styled, in the armoury of Roslin Castle. By means of a private door, the presence of which was revealed to me by the Lieutenant Redman, I was enabled to overhear all that passed between his Majesty and the lady. Such conduct on my part may have a tendency to throw distrust upon the evidence I am now giving, the more especially as it suits me to abstain from revealing my motives for having thus become a listener on the occasion. However, as I have a soul

to be saved, that which I am about to report is strictly true! I vow, therefore, that in my hearing did the lady acknowledge that she belonged to a proscribed and branded family—unto which avowal his Grace gave assurance of full and complete pardon for herself and her brother. At the altar she disclosed the name of Logie—and yet the ceremony was accomplished!"

"Out of my sight, base wretch!" ejaculated David, now losing all control over his temper. "If you have spoken truly, you have shown yourself to be a villainous eavesdropper!—but if you have spoken falsely, your character is even still more infamous!"

Stephen Cochrane suddenly started as if a spirit of defiance were aroused within him, and his lips wavered as if he were about to say something,—when, on a signal from Prince de Salza, he retired from the front of the dais, and mingled with the group from the midst of which he had emerged. There was again an immense sensation in the hall: again were fears turned into hopes—and again was there a startled wonderment at the accuracy and precision which step by step marked the proceedings of the Grand Master.

"But if," exclaimed the King, "the words which that man has just spoken be true, the certificate will bear evidence thereof on its face. If the lady gave the name of Logie, as he declares she did, that name will figure in the certificate!"

"Behold it!" said Prince de Salza, producing the parchment and holding it before the King's eyes. "Does it not run thus—'*Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan, otherwise Logie?*'"

David would have seized upon the certificate: but Prince de Salza held it in such a manner that he could not accomplish his purpose; and he whispered, "Sire, this is not conduct worthy of a Monarch who proclaims that he is inspired by a sense of justice only!"

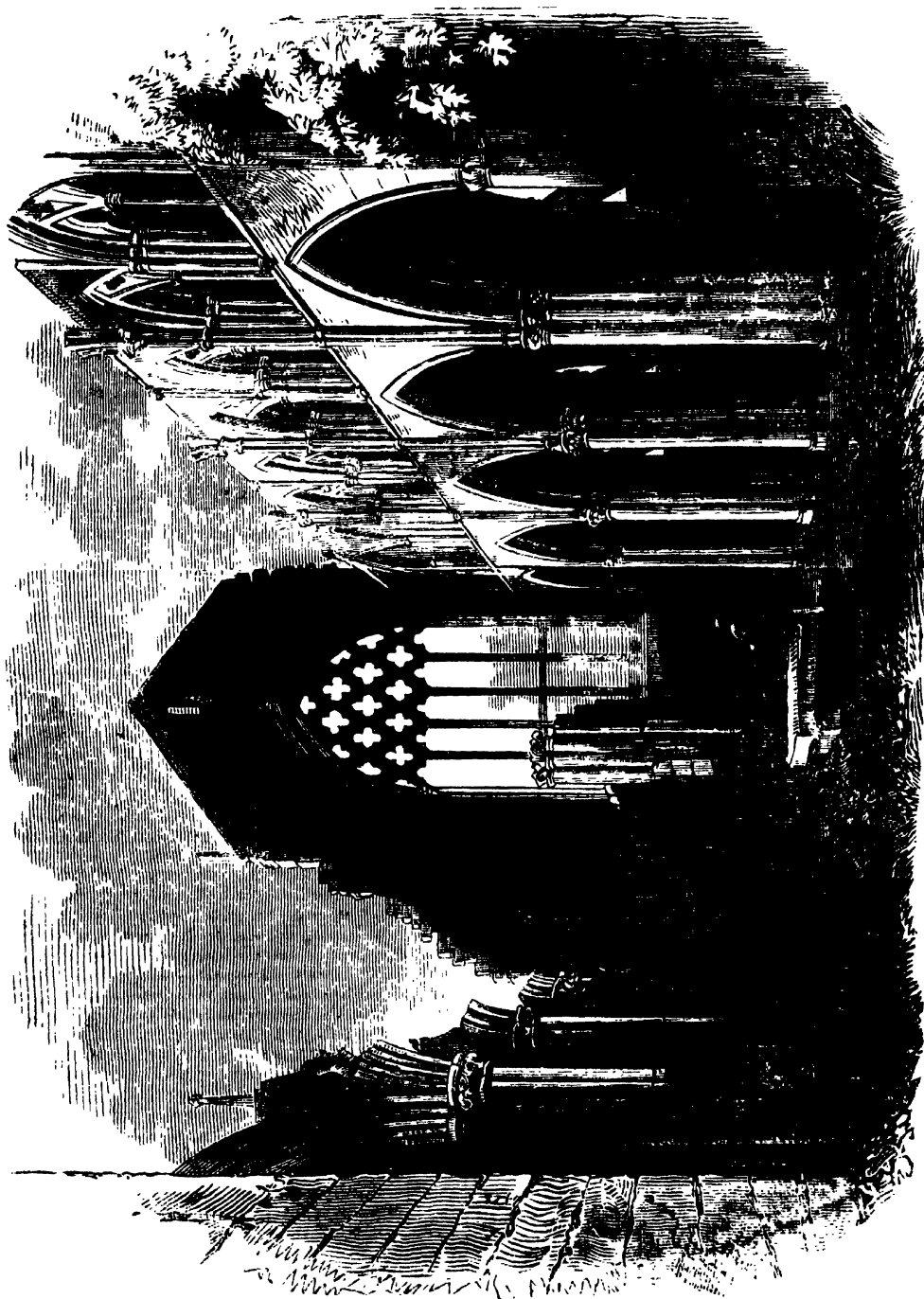
David bit his lip for an instant—he flung a glance of rage and defiance upon the Grand Master—but the latter, apparently heeding not David's wrath, said in the same calm tone as heretofore, "The point last raised is now brought to an issue in favour of the lady-claimant."

"Your Highness takes that document, therefore," exclaimed the King, "as a proof that she had my pardon at the time of the ceremony?"

"Of a surety, sire," responded De Salza; "and all the decrees of the Black Parliament were in a moment abrogated, so far as that lady was concerned, by the fact that you, knowing her to be a grandchild of the attainted Sir John Logie who perished on the scaffold, nevertheless espoused her! Her whom you thus espoused, you pardoned! You absolved her from all legal disabilities—you restored her to the enjoyment of all civil and religious rights!"

"Ah! is it so?" ejaculated the King, rendered furious and transported with a rage beyond all power of self-government, as he at the moment caught the malignant look which was flashing from the eyes of the Black Douglas. "But where is the pardon for her brother Fleming? What ho, guards! arrest the traitor! lay hands upon that young Knight! Were there ten thousand Teutonic warriors here, the King of Scotland shall be lord and master in his own fortress!"

There was on the very point of ensuing a scene of the wildest excitement: the whole assemblage appeared to be about to break up into confusion of persons and parties—Sir Fleming's sword was already half drawn from its sheath—the Teutonic warriors were making a movement to form a protecting circle about him—some of the King's guards



were preparing to obey the mandate of their royal master to arrest our hero—the peers and paladins and great nobles were glancing at each other as if asking what part they ought to take at the present momentous crisis,—in short, it was as if everything that was order and regularity a moment before, was about to change into the chaos of wildest confusion, turmoil, and strife,—when the conduct of Prince de Salza in an instant dominated the whole scene.

"Peace and silence!" he again ejaculated:—and then all was still.

King David flung upon him a look of mingled inquiry and defiance: and Maude in the gallery whispered exultingly to Margaret, "My life for it, dear lady, all will yet go well! Your Highness will triumph in everything!"

"Your Majesty," said the Grand Master of the Teutons, "has proclaimed that this is a day on which justice shall pursue its march with stern precision and with undeviating step. I ask, therefore, is it justice to decree the arrest of one towards whom your royal pardon has been solemnly accorded?"

"My pardon?" exclaimed the King, stricken with renewed amazement and anger: "my pardon?"

"Yes, sire. Behold it!"—and with these words the Grand Master produced a scroll which he hastened to unfold. "Take it, sire!—for," he added significantly, "I have its duplicate."

At the same time the Prince produced another scroll, which he handed to Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan—as we shall still call the young Knight,—while David hastily ran his eyes over the document which had been placed in his hands.

"It is as I have represented," said De Salza; "full and free pardon—exemption from all taint and ban—abrogation of the decrees of the Black Parliament for all descendants, present or future, of the house of Logie—as well as complete immunity towards all persons who may in any way have succoured, harboured, or befriended them. And there is the Royal autograph!—and here the attesting signature of the Secretary of the Royal Council!"

For a moment a demoniac expression of rage seized on David's features: but the next instant a thousand considerations swept through his mind, showing him with startling rapidity how utterly he was beaten at every point, and how useless it were for him to wrestle against a genius and a power which he saw to be in every respect superior to his own. His course was accordingly at once settled.

Becoming as suddenly calm and collected—at least externally—as he had a few moments before grown wild with rage, he whispered with cold irony in the Grand Master's ear, "You have indeed made good use of the blank documents which I signed:"—then raising his voice and addressing the assemblage, he said, with that show of sovereign dignity which he so well knew how at times to assume, "The illustrious Prince is right in respect to this pardon. It was a transient oversight on my part to question or dispute it. And now—and now—" he hesitated for an instant—for an instant too he grew pale—but the next moment recovering himself, he added, "And now, I have naught else to urge against the claims of Queen Margaret."

Queen Margaret! The words were pronounced—the acknowledgment was made—she was recognised as a bride and as a Sovereign! Her heart thrilled with a joy unspeakable—an ecstasy transcending the power of description! But now the almost preterhuman strength of mind which had hitherto sustained her throughout the startling transitions of the ordeal, gave way,—melting, so to speak, in the raptures which took possession of her

soul. She retained consciousness long enough to hear the cries of "Long live Queen Margaret!" pealing through the hall, announcing the decision of the immense majority of the assemblage; and she sank back senseless in the arms of Maude and the tirewomen.

"Fleming—dearest friend! a thousand, thousand congratulations!" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne, who, having made his way towards the young Knight, was now clasping both his hands with a fervid vehemence.

"Oh, to think that it should have ended thus!" murmured Fleming, scarcely able to gasp out the words through excess of joy. "What wonders! what marvels!"

"My lord," said Jassent, who at this moment accosted the young Earl of Bassentyne, "now is the time to bring your plaint before his Majesty."

"Oh, no! I have now no plaint to make," answered Roland, with a strange expression of countenance: then perceiving that both Jassent and Sir Fleming gazed upon him with a look of surprise, he added with self-possession, and yet with apparent fervour, "Oh, no! I cannot think of punishing Cochrane after all that he has this day done in the good cause!"

CHAPTER LV.

THE CARLYON FAMILY.

WE must now return to the Countess of Morton, whom we left at Dalketh Castle. It must be borne in mind that Margaret, attended by Maude, effected her escape from that fortress between seven and eight o'clock in the morning of the day previous to the one of which in recent chapters we have been writing. The first intimation which the Countess of Morton had of Margaret's disappearance may be explained in a few words. The Countess sent Minnie with a message apparently courteous and respectful, but in reality full of hypocritical intent, to Margaret: but the young damsel, on reaching the suite of apartments that had been allotted to Margaret, was surprised on finding no one there. She hastened back to her mistress with the intelligence: a search was instituted—but Margaret was nowhere to be found. Maude likewise was missing; and it was therefore tolerably apparent that this damsel had chosen to follow the fortunes of the fugitive lady. But how had the escape been effected? Lady Morton's two grim men-at-arms who were stationed at the gate, vowed and protested that their vigilance had not been baffled, and that it was utterly impossible for Margaret and Maude to have passed out of the Castle by that means of egress, no matter what disguise they might have worn. Never did mystery seem more complete! There was but that one mode of egress—or at least so it seemed on the face of it; for not even the wildest conjecture could possibly have suggested the probability that the two female fugitives had passed through the monastic establishment adjoining. There were no walls that could be climbed over—there were no secret outlets, with the one exception of that door opening into the monastery; but this means of escape was, as we have just said, at once excluded from the range of theory, speculation, and conjecture. At length, after having vainly made all possible inquiries and researches, the Countess of Morton came to the conclusion—which was very natural under the circumstances—that her two men-at-arms had been less vigilant than they pretended, or less sagacious than they thought them-

selves—at all events that they had been baffled by the ingenuity of the fugitives, and that they did not now like to confess that this was really the solution of the mystery. As for bribery, the Countess of Morton felt convinced that they were incorruptible; and entertaining this high opinion of them, she decided on keeping to herself her suspicions in reference to their neglect or stolidity, so that she might neither blame them nor wound their feelings on account of a supposed fault which it was now too late to amend.

We should observe that the Countess of Morton, on proceeding to the suite of apartments whence Margaret and Maude had fled, discovered in the old-fashioned wardrobe, the skull and the brazen crown which had been put into requisition as a means of intimidating and deceiving Margaret, but which had so signally failed to produce the hoped-for effect. On finding those objects there, the Countess Louisa was more than ever convinced that she had misapprehended Margaret's true character, and had failed to give her credit for the strength of mind, fortitude, and self-possession, with which she was in reality endowed. The Countess therefore could not help feeling a certain degree of contempt for her own narrowness of mind and paltriness of invention which had led her to have recourse to a trick which she now regarded as wretched, poor, and despicable in the extreme. Now that it was too late, Louisa perceived that she ought to have used other weapons in dealing with Margaret; and instead of thinking to treat her as a school-girl who was to be terrified by a death's head, she ought to have grounded her plans on the premise that, while acting on the King's behalf, she had to cope with a woman of sagacity and firmness, of strong will and lofty intelligence.

But what was to be done? Could the Countess possibly counteract the mischief which had been accomplished? could she redeem the blow which was now only too evidently sustained by the King's cause? or should she abandon that cause altogether? In a word, should she still endeavour to help the Monarch to extricate himself from his embarrassments in respect to Margaret? or should she now leave him to shift for himself, and return without any farther delay into England? No: this latter alternative was assuredly not the one which the Countess of Morton was likely to adopt! For it must not be supposed that she had at the outset been instigated by mere friendship towards the King, in consenting to become his agent, tool, and instrument in the base conspiracy by which he had sought to reduce Margaret to the necessity of submitting to any terms he might dictate. The Countess of Morton had her own special interest to serve; and she had been all along playing a deep game. But here we must enter into certain retrospective details in order to enlighten the reader on this point.

It must be remembered that the Countess of Morton was fully thirty years of age, and perhaps even a little more. When in her seventeenth year she became the mistress of King David of Scotland, at that time a prisoner at the English Court. Her name was really Louisa Carlyon: her father was a knight of some fame as a warrior in his earlier years, but all the latter period of his life was given to debauchery. He died, leaving a grown-up family of three sons and three daughters, to find themselves completely impoverished by their sire's extravagancies; and thus they separated,—the young men entering the English army which was engaged in the French war—the young ladies seeking asylums at the dwellings of those relations who were willing to receive them. Of the three sisters,

two contracted indifferent marriages—and the third became the mistress of the Scottish King. Of the three brothers, naught of a more favourable character can be said; for the eldest, imitating his deceased father's example, tarnished the fair fame which he had acquired on the battle-field, by the grossest debaucheries, and was killed in some drunken fray. The second brother was detected in holding a traitorous correspondence with the French general, and was ignominiously put to death as a spy. The third brother, who bore the name of Louis (as the third sister bore the name of Louisa) disappeared suddenly from the English army, and was heard of no more. Some thought that, feeling himself dishonoured and degraded by the conduct and fate of his brethren, he had committed suicide; while others, still less charitable in their constructions, insisted that he had gone over to the French side, and that having revealed whatsoever particulars it was worth while to impart in reference to the English position, numbers, and intentions, he had been sent to Paris to be provided for by the French King. However, very certain it was that Louis Carlyon disappeared shortly after the death of his two brothers, and was heard of no more.

From the details which we have just given, the reader may perceive that Louisa Carlyon did not belong to a family calculated to invest its name with much respect; and she assuredly failed not to contribute on her own part to its degradation and disgrace. She became, as we have said, the mistress of King David during his captivity in London. One of the most devoted adherents of that monarch throughout all his misfortunes, was the Earl of Morton. The Earl was one of those men who notwithstanding their weaknesses and their vices, generally contrive to sustain a decent reputation and to throw a hypocritical gloss over their real conduct and pursuits. The Earl of Morton was a libertine and a debauchee—profligate and dissipated—weak-minded and easily led by any designing persons; but still he was strong and consistent on one particular point—and this was in his devotion to his Sovereign. From that faith and fealty nothing could have induced him to swerve; and though utterly unprincipled in all other respects, he would sooner have perished than deviate one hair's breadth from his loyalty to David. With him it was almost a worship: it was a prejudice—a passion. Frequently thrown in the way of Louisa Carlyon during the years that she was the Scotch King's mistress in the English metropolis, the libertine heart of the Earl of Morton was inflamed by her charms; but his sense of duty to the King was such as to prevent him from bending a disrespectful look upon the royal paramour. This very circumstance, however, fanned his passion all the more, and even imparted to it something of the character of a sentimental love. The secret which he flattered himself he was so successfully keeping, was in due course fathomed alike by its object Louisa Carlyon, and by the King. Just at that period the long-exiled Monarch was expecting to return to his native Scotland; and he was by no means sorry to hail an opportunity of providing for his English mistress. He bade her lavish her blandishments upon the Earl of Morton; and to the Earl himself he privately dropped such hints that failed not to have their effect upon the weak-minded nobleman. What chance had the Earl of Morton in escaping from a net flung out by the hands of persons so shrewd, wily, and astute as King David of Scotland and Louisa Carlyon? To be brief, therefore, the lady became Countess of Morton; and the Earl felt rejoiced at being enabled to relieve his royal master from the care

and anxiety which he had expressed on account of his beautiful Southron mistress.

The King returned to Scotland,—having secretly dropped a hint to the Earl of Morton that it would be better, for many reasons, if he continued to reside with his wife in England. The Earl promised implicit obedience to the royal recommendation. Indeed, when he came to reflect after a while, he thought that the advice was most excellent. He certainly could not be proud of the antecedents of the woman whom he had made Countess of Morton; and he was loath to be placed in a position where he might be rendered actually ashamed of her. His libertine disposition was incapable of constancy; he soon began to view his wife's personal attractions with indifference—though he continued to exist in considerable awe of her imperious temper and masculine mind. She on her own side cared nothing for his allegiance and fidelity as a husband; and she therefore gave him to understand that they might live together as excellent friends, provided that there was a total abstention from interference with each other's pursuits. The compact was established; and on those terms for the last few years had the Earl and Countess of Morton dwelt together.

But during these latter years, the Countess of Morton had often reflected whether her mode of life could not be rendered still more happy if she moved amidst the splendours of a Court? At the English Court this was out of the question; for in London her antecedents and those of her family were sufficiently known to prevent the portals of respectable society from being thrown open for her admission. But would it not, she asked herself, be very different in Scotland? Her family name could be little if at all known north of the Tweed; for, as she herself discovered while residing at Carlisle, there was only the merest rumour in that part of England that the Earl of Morton when conducting her to the altar might have made a more eligible match. Furthermore, an occasional letter which the Countess received from King David, made her aware of the fact that little or nothing concerning her antecedents was suspected in Scotland; while in regard to the alliance which the Earl of Morton had formed, no one in Scotland seemed to be aware that it was David's mistress whom he had thus espoused. Nor was there even the slightest knowledge of the name she had borne or the family to which she had belonged. Thus, the consequence was that the Countess of Morton used to ask herself—"Why should not I endeavour to persuade the Earl to return to Scotland, to take his place proudly at Dalkeith and boldly introduce me as his bride? Why should not he occupy his proper post amidst Scotland's peers, and I enjoy my rights and privileges as a Scottish peeress?"

And she *did* therefore address her husband upon the subject: but he—weak-minded, ductile, and pliant in all other things—was firm and decisive in this. His reasons—though he did not enter into particular details—were twofold. In the first place he had never forgotten that the King had recommended him to continue to reside in England with his wife; and in the second place he was fearful that the real character of his Countess was better known in Scotland than it actually was. But at length arrived King David's letter, invoking the aid of Louisa Morton, "in a matter concerning a beautiful mistress, whose wayward temper had to be dealt with." The Earl and Countess had for a long time past been staying at a castellated mansion which they had hired in the neighbourhood of Carlisle; and it was there that the King's letter reached Louisa. Her husband had not the slightest objection against her compliance with the royal demand;

on the contrary, that demand itself had the effect of a paramount mandate with one who had lost not a single tittle of his former loyalty. Louisa therefore set off, arrayed in masculine attire according to the instructions contained in the King's letter—and bearing the knightly name of Sir Louis Carlyon, likewise in pursuance of a hint from the same source.

The reader is already aware that the Earl of Morton was related to the Earl of Caithness; but this latter Earl had been for seven years absent on the Continent,—during which period he had only heard a vague rumour that his kinsman Lord Morton had formed a derogatory alliance—and no other details had come to his knowledge. That the Earl of Caithness was really thus almost completely ignorant on the point, King David failed not to discover when in conversation with the nobleman during his first visit to Roslin Castle:—he therefore had foreseen that the Countess of Morton ran not the slightest risk of detection in any one point, on the part of the Earl of Caithness, when she came to Roslin as Sir Louis Carlyon.

But now let us ascertain what were Louisa's own views when embarking in the adventure that brought her from Carlisle into Scotland. She saw from the first the probability of fulfilling all the aims which for some time past had been gathering consistency in her mind: she thought that she might so well acquit herself in the task to be entrusted to her by the King as to obtain from him the permission for her husband and herself to appear at the Scottish Court, in due time, when the incidents of the enterprise in which she was to be employed should have blown over. Indeed, everything was prearranged as nicely and comfortably as possible in her own mind. She was now to personate Sir Louis Carlyon: perhaps to a few of her own people at Dalkeith Castle she might have to reveal herself as the Countess of Morton: but the fact that the gallant Knight and the noble Countess were *identical*, would become known to only a very limited number; and this incident would also in due course blow over. Then in a few months, or perhaps even a year from that date—for Louisa was in no particular hurry—she might enter Scotland as Countess of Morton, accompanied by her husband—they would be received at Court—and if anything were said in reference to a strong likeness subsisting between herself and a certain Sir Louis Carlyon who had appeared at Roslin Castle and elsewhere, the matter could be disposed of with a smile—for with the most winning affability she would ask "whether it were so very astonishing that she should resemble the young English Knight, seeing and considering that he was none other than her own brother?"

As we have stated, all these ideas were modelled into shape and form in the mind of the Countess of Morton when she set off from Carlisle to Scotland, habited as a knight, attended by Maud and Minnie appraised as pages, and followed by a couple of grim men-at-arms, whose intellects were not particularly bright, but who for that very reason asked no questions, and on whose fidelity she could most implicitly rely. She was provided with a letter from her husband addressed to the Earl of Caithness, and the nature of which communication has been described to the reader in an earlier chapter; so that no precaution was omitted to ensure the success of the enterprise in which she had embarked at the invocation of the King. And it was not merely in the hope of furthering her own aims and views that she entered with such spirit and alacrity upon the undertaking, inasmuch as apart from all selfish considerations there was an excitement in the proceeding which suited well her bold, adven-

terious, masculine character. Judging from the statements in King David's letter, the Countess of Morton fancied that it was really with a royal mistress that she had to deal,—a mistress only, and not a wife. But when, on establishing her intimacy with Margaret at Roslin Castle, and when coming to the point at which she induced the lady to fly with her to Dalkeith, she received the assurance from Margaret's lips that a real lawful marriage had taken place, she was astonished and bewildered as to what it could all mean,—though on deliberate reflection, she saw more than ever the necessity of ruining Margaret as an indispensable preliminary towards regaining on her own account any degree of ascendancy over the King. But then came the assurance which David gave her at Dalkeith, that it was only a mock-marriage which had taken place at Roslin, and by means of which Margaret had been beguiled. The Countess now once again beheld her own course to be less difficult than she deemed it during the short interval that she was led to look upon Margaret as a lawfully wedded wife, the Queen of Scotland, and perhaps sooner or later acquiring the power to avenge herself on all enemies, in case these enemies themselves should fail to crush her according to the plot in progress.

All the explanations which we have just been giving, render it more easy for the reader to comprehend the nature of the reflections which passed in Louisa's mind, when after the flight of Margaret from Dalkeith Castle, she deliberated whether she should abandon the King's cause and return to Carlisle, or whether she should make some renewed efforts to see if she could still assist him. But this deliberation did not long involve much indecision with a lady of Louisa's enterprising character, love of adventure, and intense selfishness. Her mind was speedily made up to prosecute the undertaking in whatsoever manner circumstances might direct or the exigencies of the Monarch might demand. She now lay under the belief that Margaret was after all only the King's mistress, the victim of a mock-marriage; and she thought it therefore all the more easy to aid in the accomplishment of the lady's ruin. That Margaret had fled from Dalkeith for the purpose of proceeding to Dumbarton, the Countess of course full well conjectured; and to Dumbarton she herself accordingly resolved upon now repairing. But should she journey thither boldly as the Countess of Morton, and trust to her own hardihood and ingenuity, as well as to the King's countenance, for disposing of any suspicion which might arise, or any actual denunciation which might be made by Margaret, of the fact that she and Sir Louis Carlyon were one and the same person?—or, on the other hand, should she resume her male apparel and therewith the character of the English Knight? These were points which required some little deliberation: but at length she decided on the latter alternative, and becoming Sir Louis Carlyon once again. For she reasoned within herself, that in this guise she might obtain secret or stealthy admission into the castle—she might confer privately with the King—she might at least counsel him in his embarrassments, if not actually assist to extricate him from them—her presence there need not be known to Margaret—and, in short, there was no telling to what extent she might be enabled to render herself useful to David.

Thus far Louisa's arrangements were settled within an hour or two after the flight of Margaret from Dalkeith Castle was discovered. But a slight—though very slight difficulty arose. This was in consequence of the absence of Maude; for the Countess felt that an English knight of distinction ought to be attended by a couple of pages as well as

by two men-at-arms. But the difficulty was soon surmounted; for Lockyer, the steward of Dalkeith Castle, had a buxom daughter, about eighteen years of age, named Janet, and who was well accustomed to equestrian exercises. Lockyer was by no means unwilling that his daughter should accept a situation which promised an excellent recompense; and the page's attire which Maude had left behind her, perfectly fitted the graceful form of Janet.

We therefore once again beheld the adventurous Countess of Morton arrayed in her pliant hauberk formed of myriads of interlacing steel rings, and, with the other portions of the masculine attire, ready to set out on the expedition which she had in hand. But now, instead of the small velvet cap sitting jauntily above the dark brown hair, all the luxuriant clusters of that hair were gathered inside a very light steel helmet, provided with a vizor; and to the crest of this head-piece the crimson feather was transferred from the cap. Nothing could be more elegant or graceful than her appearance! nothing could exceed the chivalrous excitement which mingled with the natural joyousness and intelligence of her countenance! Who that beheld her riding forth from the portals of Dalkeith Castle—attended by two handsome pages, as they seemed—and followed at a little interval by a couple of stalwart men-at-arms,—who that beheld this cavalcade, we ask, could have for a moment doubted that it was really some young knight whose arm was as capable of achieving feats of prowess as his figure was well calculated to win the admiration of the fair sex?

The advantage of having Janet in her train, was not merely that of rendering the little *cortège* the more complete, but likewise that of having one who could serve as a guide through a country with which the Countess and her other followers were utterly unacquainted, and where much time would be lost as well as frequent deviations from the proper road necessitated, in making inquiries as to the exact route: for Louisa had already learnt from Lockyer that she would have to pass through whole districts of forest-land where human habitations were few and far between. Let it be remembered that it was about eight o'clock in the morning when Margaret made her escape from the castle: it was now past ten when the Countess of Morton, with her attendants, set off on the same journey towards Dumbarton.

It is not our purpose to follow our travellers step by step along the route which they had to pursue. They had to accomplish a distance of about sixty miles: there was no chance of obtaining fresh horses on the road; and they must therefore deal carefully with their own steeds. But the Countess calculated that the journey might be finished before midnight; and as it was not until the following day that the grand scenes were to take place at Dumbarton, there would be plenty of time in the interval for her to confer with the King, and ascertain by what means she could now further his views or assist in his designs. At all events she would be proving she had not abandoned him in his emergency, as well as vindicating herself from the probable suspicion that she had connived at Margaret's escape from Dalkeith; and thus in any case, even though it were impossible that her services could now be rendered available, she would be establishing fresh claims upon David's gratitude.

By the time the sun's last beams were flickering in the western horizon, fifty miles of the journey had been accomplished without any incident at all worthy of note: but now something occurred which requires special mention. Our travellers were wending their way through a grove, the overarch-

ing boughs of which clothed the path with an almost complete obscurity,—while at a short distance on the right hand a twinkling light amongst the trees indicated a habitation of some kind—perhaps a forest-keeper's cottage, or else the humbler hut of a woodman. It was just at the moment when the Countess had pointed out the light to her companions, that the sounds of a galloping steed coming from behind, struck upon their ears. Now, as we have already said, the pathway being narrow, and almost complete darkness prevailing within the grove—and as our travellers were proceeding at a moderate pace—the danger suddenly arose that the advancing horseman might gallop into their midst, to the injury of himself as well as them. They therefore at once spurred their steeds to the side of the path, so that the hasty traveller might continue his own headlong course in safety. On he came, evidently without reining in his steed; so that our travellers were just congratulating themselves on the precaution which they had taken, when all in a moment the careering animal stumbled and fell, hurling its rider completely over its head. The fall was evidently one of the most dangerous heaviness; and it was accompanied with the din and clashing of armour coming in violent concussion with the hard ground. The steed was on its legs again in a moment; but its rider lay motionless. The Countess of Morton sprang from her horse, tossing the reins to Janet; and the two men-at-arms also alighted, giving the reins of their steeds to Minnie. To raise the thrown traveller was the work of an instant: he had on a helmet with a plume of feathers, and a light corset crossed by an ample scarf. To take off the headpiece and unlace the corset were now the next things to be done; and as the breastplate was being removed, something fell on the ground. The Countess picked it up: it was a packet tied by a string and sealed—so that it immediately became evident that the unfortunate individual was a courier riding thus expeditiously on account of being the bearer of despatches which were doubtless of importance. He now gave a deep groan, and suddenly started: then with a strong convulsive movement he placed his hand upon his breast; and another spasmodic start, together with the painfully murmured word “despatch,” indicated that his first thought on recovering a gleam of consciousness, was in reference to the documents with which he had been entrusted.

“Your packet is safe,” said the Countess of Morton; “it is here. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, yes—and I thank you,” were the words, painfully spoken, which were faltered forth from his lips. “Who—who—?”

“I am an English knight,” answered the Countess, conjecturing what the question was which the unfortunate courier feebly and ineffectually endeavoured to put. “Are you much injured? Shall we remove you? There is, methinks, a habitation at no great distance—”

“Thanks! a thousand thanks!” replied the courier; and the Countess could now perceive, as her eyes got accustomed to the obscurity, that all the lower part of his countenance was concealed by a dark beard, while the equally dark hair was lying thick over his forehead; so that slight indeed was the glimpse which could be obtained of his features. “No,” he went on to say; “I must not seek any habitation—until—But pray raise me up! I shall be better in a few minutes! Ah! tell me—is my poor steed injured?”

“The horse instantaneously regained his footing,” answered the Countess. “Hugo,” thus addressing herself to one of the men-at-arms—“you generally

carry a flask—I know your habit—Perhaps its contents—”

The flask was already produced; and Hugo poured a portion of the powerful liquid down the courier's throat. The draught seemed to revive him; he again requested to be raised up; and as he now stood upon his feet, he was seen to be a tall man, apparently of slender stature.

“How feel you now?” inquired the Countess, who still retained the packet in her hand.

“Thank heaven, no bones are broken!” was the response, as the stranger moved a pace or two. “But my head!—Ah!”

He applied his hand to his brow—he staggered, and was on the very point of falling, when the two men-at-arms fortunately caught him.

“It is hopeless—it is useless!” he murmured, with bitterness of accent. “Perhaps I am dying!”

“You have injured yourself! It is blood!” ejaculated the Countess, who, having hastily torn off her right gauntlet, put back the clustering hair from over the forehead of the wounded man. “A kerchief! Ah! 'tis well!” she cried, as Janet handed her one. “Let me bind your head—and then we will remove you to yonder habitation!”

“Thanks, gentle Knight,” said the stranger: “one who can display all the kindness of the good Samaritan, must possess a trusty heart. Oh, that you would do me a service!”

“Speak! what can I do for you?” inquired the Countess, who, as we have already said, was of one of those contradictory and inconsistent natures which combine generosity and even a certain degree of humanity with intense selfishness and an aptitude for all kinds of wickedness.

“Let me think of my duty first, and of myself afterwards,” murmured the courier, speaking with pain and difficulty. “That despatch—But Ah! you are an English knight?” he ejaculated, as if smitten by a thought which made him suddenly change his purpose.

“I swear to you,” answered the Countess, “that whatever cause for hesitation you may now have, it need not exist. If I can render you a service, I will do it without reference to any other consideration. You yourself speak as if you belonged to the same clime as myself—namely, the Southron land?”

“Yes, yes,” interjected the courier: “but I serve under another banner! And now too—on the Scottish soil—my sympathies—”

“Ah! if your sympathies be with Scotland,” replied the Countess, “in any particular sense, I may say the same of myself; for if marriage can have aught to do with the matter—”

“Oh! your words cheer me!” said the wounded man. “Besides, there is so much frankness in your speech! But tell me—tell me—if there were war between Scotland and England—which—which side should you embrace?”

“That of Scotland,” was Louisa's ready answer—though she would have replied in just the opposite sense if she had seen that it better suited the present purpose, for the adventure was growing more and more interesting to one of her mind and spirit.

“You swear that it is so?” ejaculated the courier joyfully. “But no!—it were ungenerous in me to exact an oath—”

“Better than oaths,” interrupted the Countess, “is the assurance that by marriage I am connected with one of the proudest Scottish families—a fair domain on Caledonia's soil is mine—and right well do I stand in the favour of Scotland's Monarch.”

“Then naught more could I wish or demand!”

said the courier. "Oh, my head! Stop!—do not move me! There! Hold me thus!—Listen! That packet—Will you ride, Sir Knight—fleet and fast—straight to the valley of the Leven—'tis but some fifteen miles hence—"

"And not far out of my route," interjected the Countess, "seeing that I go to join the King at Dumbarton."

"Ah, then you will do my behest!" resumed the wounded man. "Speed, I say, to the valley of the Leven—there you will find an assemblage of warriors—the despatch is for their chief—General Sarsfeldt. You will require a token to pass the outposts—and you must know the watchword—for into the General's own hand *only* must you deliver the packet!"

"And the token?" inquired the Countess, now marvellously relishing this adventure.

"Take my scarf," said the warrior, "and wear it in true knightly fashion. When the moment of need comes, point to it as a token."

"I have the scarf," said Louisa, snatching it up from the ground, throwing it over her right shoulder, and knotting it below her left hip to a portion of her sword-belt. "And now the pass-word?"

"*The Crimson Cross!*" rejoined the courier. "At the time that you pronounce it, make the sign of the cross on your own breast. And now—now, Sir Knight—tell me—tell me—your name—that I may bless the generous warrior—Oh, my God! is this death?"

He sank back, insensible, in the arms of Louisa's two grim followers.

"Stay you with him, Hugo," said the Countess hastily; "and you likewise, Minnie! Bear him to yon habitation—"

"He still breathes," interjected Hugo.

"So much the better! he may yet live!" rejoined the Countess. "Do my bidding—give him into safe and kind keeping—and then hasten onward to Dumbarton. You know the instructions I have already given in case by any accident we should be separated."

The Countess of Morton secured the packet about her person: she then sprang upon her steed—and, followed by Janet, galloped away from the spot where this adventure had occurred.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE VALLEY OF THE LEVEN.

THE courier was left in a state of unconsciousness, in the arms of Hugo and Ulrick, the two grim-looking troopers—while Minnie likewise remained upon the spot. This damsel and Hugo had, as the reader has observed, received special orders to devote themselves to the care and attention of the wounded individual until he should be consigned to some decent and proper keeping—but it was evidently the intention of the Countess that Ulrick should follow in personal attendance upon herself. Accordingly, so soon as Minnie had taken his place in assisting Hugo to support the unfortunate stranger, Ulrick remounted his steed and rode after his mistress and Janet. He found them waiting for him on the outskirts of the wood; and so soon as he made his appearance, the Countess indicated the rate at which they were now to travel by again urging her steed into a fleet gallop.

We have already hinted that the new adventure which had so suddenly presented itself, was by no means in discordance with the singular phases of the Countess of Morton's character—so contra-

dictory and inconsistent those phases were, showing how humane and generous deeds could sometimes be performed by one who on other occasions was capable of actions the vilest and the worst. But let us pause for a few moments to ascertain what were the thoughts which passed through the mind of her ladyship as she now rode forward with the despatch secured about her person. She naturally pondered whether this new adventure would entail any inconveniences upon herself; for she could not of course forget the purposes for which she had undertaken a journey from Dalkeith to Dumbarton. But a very few moments' meditation convinced the Countess that little or no inconvenience would arise to herself from the accomplishment of the mission which she had undertaken. From the spot where the accident occurred to the courier, the distance was ten miles to Dumbarton; and it was fifteen into the Vale of Leven. It was therefore simply an extra distance of some five miles that she would have to ride; and this was a matter of no considerable import. As for the extra time that would be occupied, Louisa thought to herself that it ought not to exceed a couple of hours at the outside, allowing for the ceremony of an interview with General Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt: for such was the name that appeared on the envelope of the despatches. Thus, to be brief, it was really putting the Countess, as she thought, to no particular inconvenience to become the bearer of that despatch. Besides, her curiosity was now enlisted in the adventure. Who was this General Sarsfeldt to whom the missive was addressed? It assuredly was not either a Scotch or an English name. And who were the warriors that appeared to be collected in the vale of the Leven, and whose chieftain could only be approached by signs so precise as those which had been unfolded to the knowledge of the Countess? Had that assembling of troops anything to do with the King's present policy or proceedings? Louisa thought this by no means impossible, as she reviewed certain broken and incomplete sentences which had fallen from the lips of the courier. At all events, this individual had said enough to convince the Countess that his sympathies were with King David and with Scotland; and therefore she said to herself, "Whatever the nature of the business may be in which I now bear more or less a part, charged as I am with despatches of importance,—it is quite evident that I cannot be doing King David a disservice—but, on the other hand, may possibly be forwarding some special purpose on which he relies for the accomplishment of his aims."

The Countess, Janet, and Ulrick rode onward at a rapid rate. The damsel was at a loss to indicate the road which it was necessary to pursue; for, as we have already said, she was familiar with the districts through which the journey lay;—nor in this respect was she at all embarrassed by the deviation which it was now necessary to make from the straight line of route originally intended. The moon and stars shone brightly; and after a while Janet pointed out to the Countess the two-headed rock on which stood the fortalices of Dumbarton.

"Here we are to turn off to the right hand," said Janet; "for this is the point where deviation must be made from the main route in order to bring us into the valley of the Leven."

"One moment!" ejaculated the Countess of Morton, as a thought struck her.

The bridles of the three steeds were accordingly pulled in at the same instant, and Louisa still reflected for nearly a minute before she went on speaking. It had occurred to her that Margaret might not possibly have gone straight to Dum-

barton, and that it was of the highest importance for the King to be made acquainted with the fact of her escape and flight from Dalkeith as soon as possible. Now, notwithstanding Louisa had calculated that her own arrival at Dumbarton would not be delayed beyond a couple of hours, yet she felt that she ought not to place too much reliance on this estimate; for it was impossible to say how one circumstance might succeed upon the footsteps of another. She therefore resolved to send Ulrick on to Dumbarton, from the point where she had just commanded a halt; while she herself and Janet pursued their way into the Vale of Leven. The Countess entertained no apprehension in continuing her journey, thus comparatively undefended; for she was naturally of an intrepid and daring disposition. Her instructions to Ulrick were accordingly soon given; and the man, accustomed to pay a blind passive obedience to the will of his adventurous mistress, at once set off along the road which led towards Dumbarton Castle—while the Countess of Morton, now attended only by Janet, turned off in a northerly direction, so that by the shortest cuts across the fields and through the woodlands they might reach the valley of the Leven.

"Be not frightened, good Janet," said the Countess, "that we two of the tender sex should thus be journeying alone together: for in the first place," continued Louisa, in cheerful accents, "we have veritably the air of what we would fain seem to be—a gallant knight and his active page! Besides, according to all we have heard or may conjecture, we are going amongst those who will be grateful for our kindness in performing that task which the unfortunate despatch-bearer himself was unable to achieve."

"Rest assured, lady," responded Janet, "I have no fears nor misgivings. On the contrary, it is inspiring to ride through this beautiful clear night, with such a delicious freshness in the air—disguised too in this masculine apparel—not even requiring, like knights-errant, to seek for adventures, because they throw themselves in our way——"

"Ah, Janet!" ejaculated the Countess of Morton, laughing good-humouredly, "I am delighted to hear you speak in this lively strain. A fitting substitute will you assuredly prove yourself for that faithless Maude who so ungratefully quitted my service after the myriad acts of kindness that I displayed towards her. But let all that pass! the memory of the ingrate shall not now trouble me. No!—on the other hand, I rejoice that I should have obtained in her stead one who is so sagacious in the knowledge of routes, so cheerful of temper, and so frank-hearted as yourself, good Janet."

"And candidly do I confess, my lady," rejoined the girl, "that I infinitely prefer riding in your ladyship's train, than moping in the gloom and dreariness of Dalkeith."

"Look you, Jacob," said the Countess,—"for Jacob remember you are to be so long as you wear that apparel of a page!—you must be careful how you address me in feminine terms of distinction. I am not the Countess of Morton now," she continued, in a merry strain: "I am Sir Louis Carlyon—as gay a gallant as ever wore hauberk or braced on sword. Sometimes you may address me as 'Sir Knight:' at other times say, with a sort of respectful familiarity, as if you knew that I was never hard upon you, 'Good master of mine;' and occasionally you may thrust in some such flattering appellation as 'Most worshipful Knight.'"

"I shall not fail," answered Janet, "to bear in mind all your ladyship's—No, no!" she cried, laughing, "I mean all your worship's instructions. But

may I ask, Sir Knight," she continued, adopting a grave tone, as if she thought that she had been familiar enough and must now suffer her mood to take a turn of respectfulness—"but may I ask, Sir Knight, whether you do not think there is something strange in the signs and the nature of the password which that wounded despatch-bearer ere now explained as a means of procuring access to the chief towards whose presence we are bound?"

"By no means strange, my good page," responded the Countess. "On the contrary, the password is perfectly consistent with all the loftiest notions and associations of chivalry—as you yourself must perceive when I remind you of the Crusades——"

"True!" said Janet. "And as for the scarf which you now wear, Sir Knight, it is assuredly a most ornamental addition to your apparel, admirable though the appearance of your worship previously might have been."

"Ha! ha! you flatter!" exclaimed Louisa, with a merry laugh. "But let us now ride onward at a quicker pace!"

From the point where Louisa and her follower had parted with Ulrick, they had walked their horses about a mile; and while thus resting the animals, the preceding colloquy took place. They now continued their way at a smart trot for about three miles along the bank of a streamlet, in the clear depths of which their own passing forms and those of their steeds were mirrored with the most perfect lucidity.

"We are now approaching the river Leven itself," said Janet; "for this beautiful little streamlet is a tributary to the larger one. In the years of my girlhood, when visiting my mother's relatives in the town of Dumbarton, I used to wander through these charming districts. Even at that tender age I was impressed with the beauty of the scenery: for it was always in the summer time that I was in these parts—and I never had the misfortune to behold the region when winter's horrid spell was upon it."

"And where may the Vale of Leven be said to have its commencement?" inquired the Countess.

"At the point of junction of this streamlet and the river itself," responded Janet Lockyer. "If your ladyship looks forward, through the clearness of the night, you will perceive the meadows sloping up towards wood-crowned eminences—you will observe groves and knolls in the lower lands——"

"Yes—even by this light it is easy to distinguish the beautiful features of the scene," answered the Countess. "In the daytime, with the full glory of the sun shining upon it, the landscape must seem surpassingly fair! And now methinks we must be approaching the point of junction to which you ere now alluded, Janet: for a little farther ahead there is a broad sheet of water shining in the moonlight as if it were a lake of quicksilver."

"Yes," returned the damsel; "in a few minutes we shall enter the valley of the Leven. Might I be bold enough to ask whether your ladyship—I mean your worship—was enabled to form, from the words of the unfortunate courier, a notion whether it be a numerous host of warriors that will doubtless presently meet our eyes?"

"I have no better means than you have, minion," replied the Countess, good-humouredly, "of forming a conjecture upon the point. You heard what was said as well as I. But, in good sooth, I should conceive that the assemblage of warriors cannot be a very diminutive one,—seeing that their commandant bears a General's rank, and that their purposes or objects are of such importance as to necessitate the fleet riding of the bearer of the despatches addressed to their Chief. But we shall doubtless



soon be relieved from all uncertainty on the point," added the Countess; "for here is the confluence of the two rivers."

"And beyond that barrier of dense verdure," interjected Janet, pointing to a grove which lay a few hundred yards ahead, "stretches the district known as the Valley of the Leven."

The Countess and her companion rode rapidly towards the grove to which allusion has just been made,—their horses careering with almost noiseless hoofs over the rich grass with which the meadows were clothed. On their left rolled the Leven—on their right the fields sloped gradually upward to the woods that crowned the eminence—and before them was the grove, which, while they had as yet been at a distance, was too small to bar their view of the salient features of the landscape that lay beyond—but which, now as they approached it, appeared to constitute a veritable wall of verdure. The Countess and Janet drew in the reins of their steeds when within some fifty paces of the grove: for the former considered that it was more than likely that sentinels might be placed in the midst of that shady screen. Therefore, on approaching the grove the Countess of Morton expected every moment to be challenged: but all continued profoundly silent until the very verge of the leafy barrier was reached, and the two horses' heads were actually within the shade of the embowering verdure—and then a voice suddenly demanded in curt stern tones, "Who come?"

"Friends!" responded the Countess of Morton.

"The word?" asked the same voice.

"The Crimson Cross," rejoined Louisa.

"Pass, Crimson Cross!" said the voice: and then for a moment the form of an armed warrior emerged from the shade of the trees, as if to fling just one glance upon those to whom leave and license were thus given to continue their way.

But if such were really his object it was pretty evident that he immediately felt satisfied; for he disappeared from the view as suddenly as he had revealed himself; and from the profound silence which immediately after reigned in the spot where he was posted, no one could possibly have suspected that there was any sentinel there at all.

The Countess—remembering the instructions which the courier had given her, to the effect that when she proclaimed the pass-word she was to make a particular sign—had mechanically done so, although it was evidently useless in the deep shade which shrouded her where she had halted. Followed by Janet, she now rode onward amidst an almost total darkness. There was however a beaten path, which her steed instinctively pursued; and thus, as she and Janet continued their way without obstacle or opposition of any kind, the Countess began to reflect within herself that she perhaps ought to have mentioned to the sentinel the object which she had in view—namely, that of seeking an audience of General Sarsfeldt. But the man had vanished so suddenly, and such a profound silence had immediately followed the momentary rustling of the leaves caused by his appearance and his retreat, that Louisa was for a few instants thrown into a state of bewilderment: and she had ridden onward mechanically, as it were, totally forgetting that it were perhaps wise to give some account of the object which had brought her thither.

"At all events," she said to herself, "another sentinel or outpost will assuredly be encountered at no great distance hence; and then I may give the requisite explanations."

Some fifty yards farther did she and Janet proceed after she had made this reflection: and still was the way continued through the almost total

darkness of the grove,—when the challenge of another sentinel abruptly broke upon the silence which prevailed.

"Who comes?" was the demand.

"A friend!" was the answer given by Louisa: and she was now determined to be more explicit than on the former occasion.

"You are not alone?" exclaimed the voice.

"A single attendant is with me," was Louisa's answer.

"The word?" was the next demand.

"The Crimson Cross," was the reply.

"Pass, Crimson Cross," rejoined the sentinel, who was evidently remaining perfectly stationary; for not a leaf was heard to rustle in the neighbourhood of the spot whence the voice came, and which, as well as the Countess of Morton could conjecture, was scarcely six paces from her horse's head.

"I pry'thee, give me some information, worthy sentinel," she said, "touching and concerning—"

"Pass, Crimson Cross—and silence!" ejaculated the voice of the hidden one; and his tones were those of stern imperious command.

At the same moment a metallic sound—such as might have been caused by a drawn sword striking against a corslet or a gauntlet, perhaps arising from some impatient gesture on the part of the concealed sentinel—struck upon the ears of the Countess and Janet; and they at once pressed their steeds forward; for the intimation was sufficient to give them to understand that it was dangerous to tarry there parleying with a sentinel whose instructions were doubtless rigidly pointed to the effect that he must hold no discourse with any one after having obtained the proper watchword.

"These warriors, whoever they are," thought the Countess within herself, "are under a strict system of discipline; and it behoves those who come as strangers amongst them to be careful how they infringe upon their regulations. But who can they be?"

The way was still pursued through the darkness of the grove for another hundred yards or so; and then a glimmering light at a distance was visible through the trees. It rapidly grew more apparent—it took a lurid aspect, until the Countess and Janet were enabled to conjecture that it was produced by a torch. And now, as they drew nearer and nearer towards the sphere of that ruddy light, they perceived that it was, as they had supposed, a torch—and they saw that it was formed of some resinous bough which was thrust into an iron ring attached to a pole. Its glare threw out into strong relief the forms of two warriors clad in bright steel armour, each with a crimson feather above his helmet—and each having a crimson scarf, which was worn in precisely the same fashion wherein the Countess had adjusted the one she received from the disabled courier. Both these warriors were standing with drawn swords, in the position of sentinels, close by the post to which the torch was affixed; and so motionless were they at first, that they might actually have been taken for statues. A glance which the Countess of Morton flung around, showed her that there was another light shining a little farther ahead, and which seemed to emanate from the triangular opening of a tent. At that opening—if such it were—there was another steel-clad warrior stationed: but neither the Countess nor Janet had leisure to contemplate anything further in that direction, for one of the two sentinels watching in the glow of the torchlight, abruptly demanded, "Who come?"

"Friends," was the response, now for the third time given by the Countess of Morton.

"The word?" was the next query immediately put.

"The Crimson Cross!"—and now Louisa made the sign of the cross on her own breast, which she at once saw was awaited by the two sentinels, from the manner in which their eyes were riveted upon her.

"The token?" demanded the one who acted as spokesman.

The Countess gave no verbal reply, but simply pointed in a significant manner to the crimson scarf which she wore.

"Tis well," said the sentinel; while both himself and his comrade pointed in a similar way each to his own scarf, as if reciprocating the sign that had just been given. "Pass, Crimson Cross!"

The Countess was just on the point of making some representation in respect to the object of her visit, and inquiring whether she were proceeding in the right direction to obtain an interview with General Sarsfeldt, when it struck her that she might not yet have arrived at the end of this ordeal of forms and ceremonies, and that it would therefore perhaps be better to hold her peace until she herself should be questioned. She was accordingly continuing her way in silence, and Janet was preparing to follow, when one of the sentinels caught hold of the rein of the latter's steed, exclaiming with a stern fierceness, "Halt, Sir Page! you follow not your master farther! In good sooth, you must be a stranger amongst us not to be aware that —"

"My page is indeed a stranger amongst you," said the Countess; "and for that matter, I myself—"

"Silence, and pass on, Crimson Cross!" interrupted the sentinel, with angry impatience. "Thitherward lies your way!" and he pointed towards the second light, which, as we have already said, was at a little distance. "Your page shall be introduced amongst his fellows, and properly cared for."

The Countess, who had half wheeled round her steed on finding that Janet was thus stopped, flung a look of some anxiety on the countenance of the damsel, fearing lest she might be apprehensive on account of the purposed separation. But Lockyer's daughter was impressed with the same idea as her mistress—namely, that all these were forms and ceremonies which had to be rigidly fulfilled, and that it was utterly useless, even if not dangerous, to manifest any objection. Besides, Janet was naturally of an intrepid disposition; and like her mistress, she was endowed with a certain love of adventure. She therefore made a quick sign to the Countess to indicate her readiness to comply with the rules and regulations of those amongst whom they found themselves; and Louisa, relieved of all anxiety on behalf of the damsel, continued her way.

As she proceeded towards the second light—which she soon distinguished to be produced by another torch attached to a pole outside the entrance of a large tent—she heard one of the sentinels whom she had just passed, say to Janet, "Follow me, Sir Page, into this bye-path."

Then there was the sound of Janet's steed moving away from the spot in some direction different from that which the Countess herself was now pursuing; but as Louisa glanced behind, the damsel was no longer in view.

As the Countess approached the entrance of the tent, a man habited in the menial dress of a groom, came forward—bowed respectfully—and held the rein of the horse that she might dismount. She alighted accordingly, and advanced towards the sentinel whom we have already represented as standing at the entrance of the tent; for she saw

by his manner that he was expecting her thus to come forward so soon as she had dismounted from her saddle. Instead of putting to her the first question which already on three occasions had greeted her ears, he began by demanding "The password?"

"The Crimson Cross:"—and she made the appropriate sign.

He responded by a similar sign—and then said, "The token?"

The Countess pointed to her crimson scarf: the sentinel did the same in acknowledgment of her sign, as before;—and he said, "Pass, Crimson Cross!"

Thus speaking, he stood aside from the entrance of the tent. The Countess was on the point of entering upon some explanation, when an idea at once struck her. Was it not evidently known, by means of the very signs she had been giving, that she must be the bearer of certain despatches which General Sarsfeldt was awaiting?—was it not therefore into the presence of this chieftain that she was being ushered with so much ceremony? Such were the thoughts which swept through Louisa's mind; and therefore, without giving utterance to a syllable she passed on. A canvass curtain, of the same coarse material as that of which the tent itself was formed, was now drawn aside; and the Countess of Morton advanced a few paces. But here her way was stopped by an inner curtain, formed of the richest purple velvet, fringed with gold; and this drapery parted in the middle just at the same instant that the outer curtain of coarse canvass closed behind her.

But before we follow the Countess of Morton a single footstep further—before we even afford the reader the slightest idea of what the adventurous lady beheld on the inner side of the velvet curtain—we must return to the scene, some fifteen miles distant, where we left the wounded stranger in the care of Hugo and Minnie.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE WOUNDED WARRIOR.

THE individual to whom we have just alluded, continued in a complete state of unconsciousness; and Minnie insisted upon the absolute necessity of fulfilling the orders which the Countess had given, and removing the stranger to the habitation where the light was glimmering at a distance. Hugo, thinking that the man was in a dying state, showed an inclination to deposit his form on the grass, and watch for a little while to see how matters might progress with him: but Minnie begged that the more humane course might be adopted. Hugo, recollecting the mandates of the Countess, accordingly proceeded to follow the girl's recommendation.

"You must lead the horses, Minnie," he said; "for it will never do to leave them here, while we seek yon cottage in the depth of the wood."

"The horses will be safe—we can tie them to the trees," said Minnie: "and then I shall be enabled to assist you in supporting this unfortunate stranger. Because it would be cruel to think of removing him by means of one of these jolting steeds, and through the tangled thicket of the wood—"

"Hark you, Minnie," said Hugo, in a firm and decisive tone, "the horses *must* accompany us. Lead them, girl, I say! I will carry the wounded man over my back, or in my arms. You shall see if the weight be too much! But, Ah! you must bring his steed likewise—though I scarcely think,

poor wretch, he will ever again have much need for it!"

Matters being thus adjusted without farther dispute, Hugo did indeed give Minnie a proof of his great strength by the manner in which he now bore the wounded and unconscious stranger, amidst the trees, towards the light at a distance. Minnie led the three horses, and at the expiration of about ten minutes a small cottage was reached. It proved to be that of an old woodman, who dwelt all alone there; but his seclusion from the world had not steeled his heart against the claims of humanity,—so that he at once gave a cordial welcome to Hugo and Minnie, and declared that his humble hut should cheerfully be rendered an asylum for the injured individual.

So soon as the patient was placed upon a pallet,—a miserable apology for a bed, formed of dry leaves and a tattered coverlid of some very coarse material,—Minnie procured water and began to bathe the stranger's forehead; while Hugo passed out of the hut to see in which manner he could best accommodate the horses, if there were any shed for such a purpose—or else fasten them by some secure means to the spot, where they might browse upon the grass. Not long had Minnie pursued her kind ministrations, when the stranger began to show signs of returning consciousness. We have already hinted that he had suffered his beard to grow to such an extent as to conceal all the lower part of his countenance: but a fine handsome beard it was, of glossy black, evidently well-trimmed and carefully kept. It was also easy to perceive, notwithstanding the present disorder of the warrior's appearance, that his whiskers curled naturally; and he possessed a luxuriant head of hair. His features, though largely formed, were handsome; and his age appeared to be about five-and-thirty. We have already said that he was tall: we may now add that his figure was symmetrically shaped, evidently combining strength with activity. The helmet and corslet—which Minnie had been careful to bring with her from the spot where the accident occurred—were made of steel of polished brightness, and were of excellent workmanship. Upon the breast-plate of the corslet was a large crimson cross; and a similar sign marked the front of the buff jerkin in which the wounded man appeared when divested of his armour. He was evidently a person of no common order, though perhaps of no very high one: the materials of his panoply and raiment were good, without being costly; and though the spurs that he wore were not the golden ones of knighthood, yet were they of the metal next in degree, for they were unmistakably of shining silver.

As Minnie was wondering who he might be—but while still pursuing her good offices and kind ministrations—the stranger opened his eyes. Large and dark were those eyes; but there was at first vacancy in their gaze as he looked up into Minnie's face—then sent his regards wandering slowly round the wretched hut—then settled them for a few instants upon the old woodman, who was lighting a fire to prepare some food for his visitors;—and then those large dark eyes were again fixed upon Minnie's countenance.

Now, if Minnie had never worn page's attire—had never enacted the character of a youth of the sterner sex—had never ridden in the train of a mistress who played the part of a sort of knight-errant—and had never been placed in situations where she was compelled to maintain the utmost command over her general demeanour, she would doubtless have blushed and averted her regards, and looked as confused as any coy maiden in such circumstances. But Minnie was too much mistress of

her own actions thus to betray her sex; and therefore, as she perceived that the stranger was regaining the possession of his intellects, she studied in every respect to seem the veritable page. Hugo now re-entered the cottage—but it was only to inquire of the woodman whether there were any chance of obtaining a decent meal?—for the man-at-arms saw that Minnie was by no means likely to leave the stranger until she was assured that he was beyond the pale of all peril—he knew that she had not merely the warrant, but likewise the actual command of the Countess for such a course—and he, though a little more morose and refractory in his humour than Ulrick, was nevertheless accustomed to yield obedience to her ladyship's instructions. In reply to a few whispered queries which Hugo put, the woodman gave him to understand that the remnant of a mess of seethed goat's flesh was about to be warmed up again as a refecton for the visitors: but Hugo, having an especial aversion to such food, demanded of the old forester whether there were no possibility of obtaining a more satisfactory repast? At the same time he produced some small silver coins which he chinked in his hand, as much as to imply that according to the nature of the response would the amount of the recompense be. The woodman—who, like most of the Scottish peasantry and cottiers of those times as well as of the present day, would have given his hospitality without fee or reward—was nevertheless dazzled by the prospect of a remuneration to which he was so little accustomed; and at once displaying an immense alacrity, he declared that half a mile's walk to the cottage of a woodman in better circumstances than himself, would produce the most satisfactory results. Hugo thrust some of the coins into his hand, bidding him procure the best which could be obtained from the source he had mentioned; and the old man at once set off, supporting himself by means of a long staff, and walking with an elasticity which had been imparted to his limbs by the galvanic touch of the coins.

"The despatch bearer is recovering, meseems?" said Hugo to Minnie, as she approached the pallet where the wounded individual lay.

The seeming page replied in the affirmative; and Hugo, having inquired whether he could render any assistance, and being answered in the negative, intimated that he should go forth again to look after the horses until the return of the old woodman, who had promised to supply something palatable for the evening's repast.

Minnie was now altogether alone with the wounded warrior. He seemed to be rapidly regaining the possession of his intellects and collecting his ideas. Once more he sent his looks slowly wandering around the wretched hovel: an expression of mistrust and surprise appeared upon his countenance; and again did his regards settle upon Minnie, as if seeking an explanation of the position in which he found himself. Adopting all the off-hand habits of a page—yet with a sufficient degree of kindness to intimate that she was friendly disposed—Minnie applied another wet bandage to the invalid's brow, and asked him if he felt better? He made an effort to speak. Minnie raised her finger to her lips, to imply that he had better not over-exert himself; and then she said, "If you do not precisely recollect what happened to you, let me assure you that you are amongst friends."

"Yes—I know it—I feel it," painfully gasped the stranger. "But tell me—the despatch—"

"It is safe," rejoined Minnie: "my master has taken charge of it. Do you not remember—a gallant young knight—"

"Yes," said the warrior, who was evidently re-

gaining his strength—and this too much more speedily than Minnie could have hoped. “A young English knight—he spoke well and fairly—”

“And he will act as he spoke,” rejoined Minnie. “Be not under any apprehension—your packet will be safely delivered at its destination—”

“St. John of Jerusalem be thanked for this assurance!” said the invalid warrior, fervently. “Let me collect my thoughts. I was hurled from my steed—Ah! what of that good horse of mine? The animal hath served me faithfully for some seven or eight years—it was a present to me from the noble master whom I serve—and this was the first time that I ever knew Surefoot, as in another language I call him, to make the slightest trip, much less to stumble so faultily.”

“Your steed is safe,” returned Minnie. “One of my master’s men-at-arms has taken him under his special care. Indeed, Hugo—the trooper of whom I speak—would rather let a human being suffer for lack of proper ministration, than deal unkindly by a gallant charger. And I can add thereunto the comforting assurance that your animal has sustained as little injury as possible, for I myself led him hither—and though it was in the darkness of the wood that I hastily examined him, yet I flatter myself that I am a sufficient judge—”

“Excellent youth!” ejaculated the prostrate warrior; “every minute do I become more and more sensible to the kindnesses which I have received from your gallant master and all who are connected with him! Give me your hand, boy! Ah! ’tis a tiny hand—and a soft one!—but not the less fervently is it pressed in a grateful soldier’s clasp! You are but young—very young: but doubtless the day will arrive when this hand of yours, now so tender and so delicate, shall harden with the habit of clutching the good sword!”

The invalid had been speaking these last few sentences with some little difficulty; and his lips seemed to be parched. Minnie hastened to place water to his lips; and he drank copiously of the refreshing draught.

“That limpid beverage,” he said, “is better than the choicest wines of France, Italy, Hungary, or the Teutonic Principedom—for I have tasted them all. But tell me, young page—for my brain was somewhat addled at the time—and it is not now altogether recovered from its confusion,—tell me, I ask, did I make myself rightly understood in reference to the signs and tokens by which that gallant master of yours is to find access to the great Chieftain unto whom he is sent?”

“Most confidently can I assure you,” responded Minnie, “that whatsoever instructions you gave my gallant master will be intelligently and punctually followed. I myself heard all that you told the worshipful Knight; and so far as I can judge, nothing could have been clearer or more explicit.”

“’Tis well,” said the warrior, with an air of visible relief. “Accursed mischance which prevented me from accomplishing my duty! But when such ill-luck occurred, and I found myself so sorely disabled, the best thing to be done was to find a substitute as active and as trustworthy as myself. This in the present instance has been accomplished—and I devoutly thank the blessed Virgin and all the Saints for the same!”

“You just now said that you served a noble master,” observed Minnie: “might I without indiscretion inquire who that master is? Deem me not impertinent—it is a mere fleeting curiosity—and if you decline to afford it gratification, no umbrage will be taken on my part. Perhaps I might as well add that being a comparative stranger in Scotland, I am little acquainted with the special martial garbs and particular uniform trappings—”

“I serve no Scottish master,” interrupted the warrior. “Do not question me now: anon you will doubtless know more; for your own gallant master will presently learn who be those warriors into whose midst I have sent him by means of signs and tokens which were hallowed in their origin by being devised amongst the shrines and sanctuaries of holy places in Palestine.”

Minnie looked bewildered—and she even fancied for a moment that her patient’s brain was somewhat affected. But the warrior, raising himself up to a sitting posture, said with the most lucid calmness of look and manner, “I feel that I am so much better now, I will leave this wretched pallet and endeavour to move about.”

“At least remain as you are for a few minutes,” replied Minnie; “and do not over-tax your energies. Consider the severe shock they have sustained—”

“True, my young friend,” observed the warrior: and he remained accordingly in a sitting posture on the pallet. “But, Ah! now I bethink me—though a certain requisite discretion prevents me for the moment from naming my master, on whose behalf I was riding fleet and fast with despatches to one of his subordinates—”

“General Sarsfeldt?” interjected Minnie, struck by the idea that if a personage of so high a rank were the mere subordinate of this warrior’s master, that master himself must enjoy a very high distinction.

“Yes—the same—General Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt,” said the invalid. “You never before heard of him?”

Minnie shook her head.

“I thought as much,” muttered the warrior to himself; “for it is only the *very greatest* names amongst us whose fame travels from our Principality to these far-off shores!”

“Were you saying something?” asked Minnie, whose curiosity was excited on many points.

“I was musing to myself, fair youth,” replied the warrior. “But I was about to observe that although I have with a seeming churlishness solicited that you will for the present abstain from playing the part of questioner, yet that on the other hand there can be no possible indiscretion in my beseeching to be informed of the name of the gallant Knight, your master, who is rendering me so great a service? I would know it, that even if we never met again, I might in my prayers remember a name which must ever be dear to me.”

“There is not the slightest indiscretion in your putting the question,” replied Minnie: “nor can I have the least hesitation in answering it. The name of my master is Sir Louis Carlyon?”

The warrior bounded on his seat, with a wild astonishment that was fully depicted in his looks; and he ejaculated, “Louis Carlyon, boy? But this is impossible!”

Minnie was for a moment frightened by the vehemence of his manner; but instantaneously recovering herself, she said, “It is as I tell you. Wherefore this surprise—this wonderment? Do you disbelieve me?”

It had naturally struck the disguised girl that the warrior must have some reason for suspecting the secret of her mistress in respect to the fact that Sir Louis Carlyon was really the Countess of Morton: but she was determined to display as much self-possession as possible.

“Louis Carlyon?” he repeated, in accents so replete with mingled amazement and bitterness that Minnie quailed before him. “Louis Carlyon?”—and now he sprang up from his seat, with as much energy and activity as if he had sustained not the

slightest injury of any kind. "What strange coincidence is this? Whence comes your master, boy?"

"I beseech you to compose yourself," said Minnie. "At all events I shall answer you no more questions."

"By heaven!" ejaculated the warrior, "I will see if I cannot make you speak! All that you have done for me will go for naught unless you satisfy my curiosity where you have so poignantly excited it! Tell me—whence comes this master of yours?"

"Did he not tell you he was an English knight?" asked Minnie. "Is this the reward for the readiness with which——"

"Ah! I see that from your lips I shall obtain no information!" exclaimed the warrior; "and it were indeed on my part an ill requital for good services rendered, to deal with you harshly! Yet, 'tis a mystery which so perplexes and bewilders me—so fires my brain,—makes my heart so wildly palpitate—that I can no longer rest until I shall have solved it. Give me my corset!"

"It is impossible you can go hence," said Minnie, in affright, "wounded as you are——"

"Help me with this harness!" interrupted the warrior, with fiercest vehemence, as he sprang towards the spot where his corset lay, and snatched it up. "There! fasten the straps! Quick, quick! my young friend!—ply those delicate fingers of yours! Why, by St. John of Jerusalem! one would now take you to be a trembling girl——"

"Oh, indeed! if it be your resolve to depart," said Minnie, veritably quivering lest her sex should be discovered, "I am prompt to succour you. How goes this strap? Ah, I see! and now 'tis done!"

"And my helmet!" exclaimed the warrior, now snatching up the headpiece.

"At least retain the bandage on your brow," said Minnie; "for the blood may gush forth afresh."

"Yes, yes—I will keep the bandage on! Look! the helmet goes well over it! And now my steed?"

"One word, stranger!" said Minnie, who could scarcely command the accents of her voice. "If through any inadvertence I have told you something which—I mean to say that if you be angered for any reason against my—my—master——"

"Not a whit of it!" ejaculated the warrior. "But 'tis a mystery so astounding—However, be you under no apprehension! Your master is doubtless at this moment rendering me an immense service—and I am incapable of repaying it with ingratitude! As for you, boy, I never shall forget your kind ministrations!"—then, having fervidly wrung Minnie's hands, he reiterated the words, "And now my horse?"

"It is somewhere in the neighbourhood," responded the damsel. "I have already told you that Hugo has it in his care——"

"Enough! Farewell!" interrupted the warrior. "Here is a piece of gold for thee, boy—and another for the people of this cottage, to whomsoever it may belong. And now once again farewell!"

With these words the warrior darted out of the hut with a precipitation and alacrity as great as if no mishap nor injury of any kind had so recently befallen him.

Minnie stood in the middle of the cottage, mechanically turning over in her hand the two golden pieces which had been thrust into it,—utterly lost in bewilderment as to how the mention of her mistress's assumed name could have produced so startling an effect upon the man who but half an hour before was plunged into a state of unconsciousness. She soon heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs passing away from the neighbourhood of the cottage;

and then Hugo rushed in at the door, which the warrior had left ajar.

"Is he gone?" demanded Minnie, hastily.

"Yes—and as precipitately as if Satan were on his track!" replied the man-at-arms. "He came bursting through the trees towards me; for there is a spot where I put the steeds to graze, on which the moonlight descends through an opening amidst the foliage. So he distinguished me there—he demanded his steed—methought that he was about to repay kind offices with churlish ingratitude—but he thrust these two broad pieces into my hand—and so the angry word which had risen to my lips, was changed into one wishing him 'good speed!' He is no chicken-hearted galliard, Minnie, that he recovers so quickly from an injury, and gallops away to assure himself that his despatch has gone to the proper quarter!"

"His recovery was indeed rapid," observed the damsel, who did not think it necessary to enter into any particulars relative to what had just taken place.

"We will await the woodman's return," said Hugo, "in the hope that he will bring us a morsel worth eating; and then you and I will continue our way to Dumbarton."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE INTERIOR OF THE TENT.

WE must now return to the Countess of Morton, whom we left at the moment she was entering the tent pitched in the grove in the valley of the Leven. The outer curtain of coarse canvass had closed behind her—the inner drapery, consisting of purple velvet fringed with gold, had at the same instant parted in the midst—and she beheld a scene which struck her with mingled amazement and admiration, so that she was for a moment completely riveted to the spot. But a warrior—armed like those whom she had already seen, with a crimson feather waving above his helmet, and a scarf of the same vivid hue worn over his right shoulder—at once stepped forward and made a sign for the Countess to take a seat at the extremity of a bench near the entrance of the pavilion. Louisa mechanically obeyed, without giving utterance to a syllable; for she again saw that it was not as yet the time to give any explanation, or to put any query, towards the furtherance of the object which she had in view.

The pavilion was of considerable size; and while all the canvass of which it was formed, was so painted as to represent the sails of a ship fastened together,—the upright poles, the cross-beams, and the cordage requisite for the support of the spacious fabric, were all so arranged as to seem like spars and rigging borrowed also from a vessel. The tent was brilliantly lighted by means of numerous silver lamps suspended with due regard to order and regularity to some of the spars of which we have just been speaking. At the further extremity were hung two flags,—upon one of which the word "Bremer" was embroidered in letters of gold—while the other presented to the view the word "Lubeck." At that same extremity a gilded arm-chair, with superb crimson velvet cushions, was raised upon a species of dais: but this throne-like seat was unoccupied. In front of it stood a lower chair; and this seat was occupied by a warrior whose age was midway between fifty and sixty, and whose dignified bearing as well as the richness of his armour denoted him to be a chieftain of no mean rank. His bright steel panoply was inlaid with gold: the crimson cross

upon the breast of the corselet had a gold edging or beading; and his broad red scarf was decorated at its extremities with a golden fringe.

Upon a small table on the right hand of this personage, lay a massive key; and close by there was a large scroll of parchment, partially unfolded so as to display a papal mitre beautifully painted, and underneath which was the name of Pope Clement the Third. But these were not all the objects that might be discerned upon that table. There was likewise a piece of green silk about a foot square, with a silver crescent in the middle; and this silken fragment was pinned down as it were to the table itself by a cross-handled dagger of most exquisite workmanship.

On each side of the tent there was an array of three rows of benches, covered with crimson cloth; and these were occupied by warriors armed and equipped in a uniform style—indeed, precisely resembling those whom the Countess of Morton had previously seen in the grove. They all wore brilliant steel armour, with crimson plumes to their helmets—scarves of the same hue—and crosses, also of a blood red dye, upon the breast-plates of their corselets. Within that tent these warriors were about two hundred in number: and the first glance which the Countess of Morton flung around, showed her that they were all men of martial bearing and whose demeanour left not a scintillation of doubt in the mind in respect to the prowess of their arms and the dauntlessness of their hearts. Altogether it was a grand, a beautiful, and an imposing scene which thus burst upon the view of the Countess. The appearance of the singularly painted pavilion—the dazzling brightness of the armour—the uniformity of the red plumes, scarves, and crosses—the splendour of the vacant throne at the extremity—and the flood of lustre poured forth by the massive silver lamps,—all combined to form a spectacle but little anticipated by the Countess of Morton when making her way into the depths of that grove.

A profound silence was reigning throughout the tent at the time when Louisa entered it: but so soon as she had taken her seat, the chieftain who occupied the chair in front of the throne, broke that silence. Before however we proceed to detail what he said, we should observe that the warriors present only threw for a moment a single casual glance upon the disguised lady, and then their looks were again turned towards the presiding authority of the conclave. It therefore more than ever seemed to Louisa that if she were not altogether expected—that is to say, if some bearer of despatches were not at the moment awaited—yet at all events her presence there was regarded quite as a matter of course, the simple and necessary result of the signs and tokens which she had given. The assembled warriors, while flinging upon her that passing look, seemed as if they were merely regarding a young knight who was one of themselves; and thus this behaviour on their part was calculated to place Louisa entirely at her ease: for bold though she were, and even endowed with no small amount of brazen hardihood, as we have intimated on a former occasion, she would not have liked to find herself too steadily stared at nor too closely scrutinized by the eagle eyes of those warriors. As for the chieftain who evidently presided over the conclave, she had no doubt it was General Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt; and she wondered how soon she should have an opportunity of presenting him the despatches—for she failed not to remember that it was only into his own hand that she was to deliver them. She naturally conjectured that they must be of serious consequence, considering the anxiety of the injured courier to ensure their speedy delivery: but so

solemn was the aspect of the conclave, and so impressed was the Countess with the necessity of adhering to all the forms and ceremonies observed by those into the midst of whom she was thrown, that she did not dare open her lips at the first moment to proclaim what her object was. In short, she said within herself, "They evidently knew that I am a messenger bearing the documents that have been awaited; and they will pay attention to me in my turn."

Almost immediately after the Countess of Morton had taken the seat which was indicated, the presiding chief proceeded to speak in the following terms:—

"Friends and brethren, having opened the Chapter of this encampment with all the prescribed forms and ceremonies, it behoves me, according to invariable practice, to direct your attention to the emblems by which you are surrounded, so that you may not merely have the origin of our most honourable and religious Order recalled to your minds, but that you may likewise be duly impressed with the responsibilities and obligations we have all undertaken. The origin of the Teutonic Order dates back to the year 1190. At that period the gallant armies of the Crusaders were occupied in the siege of Acre. But so desperate was the resistance of the Paynims, that the beleaguement was unexpectedly prolonged, and it was with difficulty the necessary supplies could be obtained for the Christian forces. Pestilence and famine began to rear their ghastly forms in the midst of the hosts who fought in the righteous cause. The condition of many of the soldiers of the Cross became deplorable to a degree; for the leeches and medeciners attached to the Christian army knew not how to grapple with the plague, and in many instances fled from its presence. At that time certain brave and philanthropic German merchants arrived in their ships from Bremen and Lubeck, with supplies of food for the Christian army. But it was not only food which was needed: it was likewise kindly succour and gentle ministration—for the hand of sickness pressed sorely upon the hosts that were fighting the battles of the Lord. Then those German merchant-sailors removed the spars and the sails of their vessels, carried the materials ashore, and therewith erected tents to serve as hospitals for the sick. Boldly facing the ghastly presence of the plague—dauntlessly encountering the breath of the pestilence—those merchant-sailors devoted themselves to the care of the unfortunate Crusaders who required such ministration. The noble example produced a wondrous effect: the leeches and medeciners returned to their duty—and countless volunteers pressed forward to serve as assistants in the hospitals erected with the sails, the spars, and the cordage of the shipping from the Free Towns. Behold, friends and brethren! it is in commemoration of those circumstances of our origin that the interior of our tents and our pavilions is invariably made to represent the materials which benevolence and charity converted at that time to so admirable a purpose. Yes!—and it is in honour of the towns whose noble-hearted sons so humanely deported themselves on the Syrian shore, that the names of *Bremen* and *Lubeck* are ever borne on the banners displayed at a Chapter of the Teutonic Knights."

Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt—for he the chief of the conclave really was—rose from his seat at the latter part of his oration—and slowly lifting both his arms, indicated the objects which he was specially pointing out. On resuming his chair, he continued in the following strain:—

"So well did the merchant-sailors and the nu-

merous attendants who flocked in to their succour, bear themselves throughout the arduous duties which they had undertaken, that it was resolved by the princes commanding the united armies of the Crusaders, to weld such admirable elements into an institution which might prove of permanent utility to the general welfare of Christendom. The plan was adopted—and the Order was consecrated by the name of the Knights of the Teutonic Hospital of Palestine. When the city of Acre surrendered to the united armies of the Crusaders, the Teutonic Knights were appointed custodians of the place; and if as a civil fraternity they had previously given proofs of their humanity, their charity, and their benevolence, they now had opportunities of proving to the world their prowess as a military power and their faith as a religious Order. They were honoured with the confidence of Kings and sanctified by the blessing of a Sovereign Pontiff. Behold, friends and brethren! here is the key which in every Chapter of Teutonic Knights is presented to symbolise the one that belonged to the gates of Acre, and which was entrusted to the guardianship of the brave founders of our order."

Here Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt pointed to the key which lay upon the table; and every warrior present made the sign of the cross—an example which the Countess of Morton was careful to follow.

"There," proceeded the chieftain, taking up the scroll of parchment, "is an attested copy of the Bull published by his Holiness Pope Clement the Third, solemnly sanctioning the institution of the Teutonic Order, and confirming it in all its high privileges and prerogatives as keeper of the key of Acre; for this key is symbolical of Acre itself, which was the key to the Holy Land."

As Sir Herman displayed the papal Bull, which he unrolled to its full length—namely, of exactly twelve feet, all the warriors respectfully lowering their plumed heads, again made the sign of the cross.

"Let us not be unmindful," continued the chief, "of the duties which were entailed upon us at the institution of our Order, and which were made the subject of special mention and injunction in the sacred scroll now unfolded to your view. First of all it became paramount with us to consider ourselves the devoted servants of the Cross; and hence the eternal presence of the holy symbol upon our breasts. And forasmuch as the cross was up-reared that the sins of the world might be washed away in the blood of a self-sacrificing Saviour, the cross which we wear upon our breasts was ordained to be of the hue of blood. All these things were decreed by his Holiness, and are enjoined in this sacred scroll. But this is not all. The Knights of the Teutonic Hospital of Palestine were commanded by the same high authority to make war on behalf of the Cross against the heathenism of the Crescent; and all the records of fame can testify whether this injunction has been fulfilled by the Knights of our Order. Friends and brethren! behold the emblems which depict and symbolize the successes achieved by the Knights of the Cross over the votaries of the green banner and the silver crescent of that arch-impostor Mahommed!"

Here Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt pointed to the cross-handled dagger which pierced the fragment of green silk with the crescent, that lay upon the table. Again the warriors bowed their plumed heads, and devoutly made the sign of the cross,—the Countess of Morton again taking care to imitate the example which was thus passing before her.

"As faith and good works," resumed the chief of the concave, "always meet with their reward in this world, so has it pleased heaven to shower down

choice recompensing gifts upon the Holy Order of the Teutonic Hospital. From the smallest beginnings our Order has attained the grandest results. The little knot of merchant-sailors who first landed with beneficent intent on the Syrian shore, constituted the nucleus of an immense brotherhood which has achieved sovereign dominion and a mighty empire over the fairest provinces of Europe. Look to our origin; look to our progress! look to our rise—to the consolidation of our power—and to our present condition! How can I illustrate it? Let us liken ourselves to a little silver streamlet in the rocky wilderness—always flowing onward and pursuing its course, unless pent up for a moment till the weight of its waters broke down the impediment—then rolling on in a mightier volume—spreading and expanding—receiving countless tributary streams, until its channel became broad and deep and its waters acquired the bulk of a stupendous flood! So it has been with us. Yes!—and like the fabled Pactolian river of the ancients, our stream has rolled between its banks of gold, and over its sands shining with the same precious metal; so that it has gone on accumulating wealth and gathering riches for those who are worthy to profit thereby. Our name stands high in the records of fame: our Prince is a sovereign-potentate amongst the rulers of the earth—the peer of kings—the equal of monarchs! And we, happier far than all other nations, possess the inestimable privilege of self-government in the circumstance that we elect our own rulers. All these great and manifold blessings have been conferred upon us by a munificent heaven, in reward for the high merits of our Order—our steadfast adherence to the true Christian faith—the constant readiness we have displayed to succour the weak against the strong—and our observance of all laws of honour, integrity, and true chivalry. Wherefore let us offer up our thanksgiving to the celestial bestower of all these good things—each praying in the silence of his own heart, in such terms as he may deem most consistent with the occasion and the circumstances."

Then Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt sank upon his knees; and all the warriors at once followed his example. The movement was accomplished with the same precision as if it were a purely military one, and as if it were some proceeding on the parade-ground. The Countess of Morton, having an eye keenly awake to everything that was thus in progress, comprehended that movement so quickly that not a minute behind the rest was she in sinking upon her own knees, while another glance showed her that she was to cross her arms upon her breast, with the palms turned flat inward. Then all was solemn silence in that spacious pavilion for nearly five minutes,—every one remaining perfectly motionless, with the plumed heads inclining forward, and the looks bent downward from beneath the raised vizors. A spectator might have fancied that they were so many effigies of marble, were it not that the works of the sculptor's hands are never painted with such brilliant hues as those which the crimson plumes, the scarves, and the crosses, the glittering steel of the armour, and the animation of the countenances, then and there displayed. And on this very account it was a spectacle all the more solemn and imposing, because the impression was upon the mind that there were two hundred living beings present,—two hundred living hearts beating within those steel panoplies—the incense of thanksgiving ascending from as many souls!

And now the chieftain himself was the first to rise from that suppliant posture; and his example was instantaneously followed by all the others present,—yes, and with a simultaneousness too to which the Countess of Morton formed no exception. So soon



as every seat was resumed, Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt proceeded to address the Chapter in the following strain:—

"Brethren and friends! we have now reached that point in the present proceedings at which I am permitted to reveal to you the purpose for which we have met in solemn conclave. The seat of our illustrious Prince," continued the warrior, glancing round and pointing towards the unoccupied throne behind him, "is ready for the reception of his Highness. According to my instructions, we may expect him momentarily: and his Highness will then explain the policy which has induced him to summon a detachment of his gallant troops to these Scottish shores. Friends and brethren! we, who are natives of this land, or of the neighbouring Principality of Wales, or else of the adjacent country of Ireland—though having renounced our family names and adopted others at the same time that we took arms under the cross of the Holy Teutonic Order,—we, I say, have been specially selected from amidst the thousands and thousands who constitute the chivalrous brotherhood, for the service that may be required of us in carrying out the present policy of our illustrious master. When he comes amongst us, he will explain what this policy is. It will be for us to hear and to obey. In the mean time, brethren and friends, it will be expedient for us to pass through those forms and ceremonies which were specially devised to put our devotion from time to time to the test, to remind us of our duties, and to impress upon us the nature of those peculiar links and bonds which hold us together in sacred brotherhood."

There was a brief pause marked by a solemn silence; and then the chieftain, rising from his seat, devoutly made the sign of the cross. All the others rose likewise, with the same simultaneous precision as the former movements were executed; and the Countess of Morton still deemed it expedient to imitate with accuracy those amongst whom she found herself,—though there began to arise a somewhat uneasy suspicion in her mind that she was more or less an interloper, and that these were ceremonies at which only the previously initiated ought to be present.

"We all swear by the Crimson Cross," resumed Sir Herman, speaking in a solemn voice, himself and every one else still remaining upstanding, "that we have ever adhered, that we do still adhere, and that we will henceforth with the same fidelity continue to adhere, to the principles on which our brotherhood is established."

"We swear!" said the entire conclave, speaking as if in one voice.

"We swear," continued the chief, "that we will ever espouse the cause of the weak against the strong, when the cause of the former is that of right and the cause of the latter is that of tyranny—when we find rectitude unequally matched against wrong-doing, or patriotism struggling against oppression."

"We swear!" was said in the same manner as before.

"We swear," proceeded Sir Herman, "that we will ever adhere to all things chivalrous and becoming good and true knights—that women shall ever find in us protectors and defenders, and never deceivers or betrayers—that the cause of the widow, the fatherless, and the helpless shall be espoused by us—and that so far as may in us lie, collectively or individually, we will strive to bring the right uppermost, to succour the friendless, and to make the laws of God and of humanity ride paramount over those which tyranny may proclaim for its own selfish purposes."

And then the conclave again said solemnly, "We swear!"

Sir Herman proceeded to say—"We swear that we will adhere to all things manly and becoming true knights and gallant warriors—that we will descend to nothing effeminate—that we will commingle with no mummeries, whereby the dignity of our sex may be degraded—that we will assume no disguises derogatory to that sex—that we will never put on, either for purposes of pleasantry or treachery, the garb of woman—and that in our apparel as well as in our habits, we will continuously assort ourselves with the principles of true chivalry."

"We swear!" said all the voices of the conclave except one.

That one voice which on this occasion remained silent, was that of the Countess of Morton. How could she possibly take this last oath? Unprincipled though she was, she dared not perjure herself—especially at a moment when her mind was under the impression of the solemn scene at which she found herself present.

"Brother, you spoke not?" said the knight who was nearest to her.

"Is that so?" demanded Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt. "Where there is reserve, there is evil intent. Surely, brother, you must be well aware that every one entering into a Chapter of our Order—"

The Countess of Morton now thought it time to speak out; and she accordingly said, "Great chieftain, you mistake! I am not a brother of this Order."

Indescribable was the sensation which the announcement produced. There was a general start—all eyes were turned upon the disguised lady—and every hand sought the sword-hilt.

"Have I heard aright?" exclaimed Sir Herman: "does that personage declare himself to be no brother of our Order?"

"It is true, Sir Chief," answered the Countess of Morton, whose voice trembled for a moment: but instantaneously regaining her self-possession, she added, "I am the bearer of a despatch which I pledged myself to place in the hands only of Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt. If, as I conceive, you, great chieftain, are that eminent personage—"

"Let this stranger be brought forward, guarded!" exclaimed the General.

Two knights at once drew their swords from the scabbards; and the Countess of Morton, feeling that never before in her life did she so much stand in need of her presence of mind, again by a superhuman effort gathered all courage to her aid, as she said, "Lay not hands upon me! I purpose to offer no resistance; for even if I had the intention, of what avail would it be amongst so many? I mean no evil—and of this I will soon convince you."

The knights did not touch the lady, whom as a matter of course they took to be a young warrior of the sterner sex: but they walked, one on each side of her, as she proceeded towards the spot where General de Sarsfeldt remained standing. It was a glance of eagle keenness which he fixed upon her as she produced the packet; and then his eyes were instantaneously riveted on its superscription. His look at once became full of respect and deference,—thereby proving that he recognised the handwriting; and opening the despatch, he proceeded to read its contents.

"His Highness, our illustrious Prince," he said, when he had concluded the perusal of the document, which was a brief one, "will not be here this evening. Business has detained his Highness in Edinburgh longer than he had anticipated. But

this missive should have been delivered to me by the hand of one of his own pages—"

"A few words," Sir Chief, interjected the Countess, "will explain all this. I was journeying along the road towards Dumharton, when at a distance of some fifteen or sixteen miles hence, I was witness to an accident that occurred to a horseman riding precipitately—he was thrown—his head came in violent concussion with the ground—and he was rendered senseless. I and my attendants bestowed upon him all requisite offices; and he recovered his consciousness—but not his ability to resume his journey. Intense was his anxiety in reference to that packet whereof he was the bearer. Some brief discourse passed between us, and I volunteered to convey the despatch to its destination. The injured courier of his own accord gave me the crimson scarf which I now wear—he also instructed me in the password and signs, informing me that without a due knowledge on those points I should be unable to procure admission into the presence of Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt. Finally, I left the despatch-bearer to the charge of some of my followers, while I came hither with the least possible delay."

There was a certain simplicity now mingled with the dignity and jauntiness of Louisa's accustomed appearance, which told considerably in her favour, and stamped her narrative with the air of truthfulness. Sarsfeldt and the other knights began to survey her with more interest than at first; but still there was much gravity in their looks, for the offence of which she had unintentionally been guilty, was a most serious one.

"The language in which I ought to address you," said Herman de Sarsfeldt, "is that of gratitude for your conduct towards an injured member of the Teutonic brotherhood, and likewise for having become the bearer of the despatches which he was incapacitated from delivering. But before I can possibly address you in such a strain as that, I must put a few questions, to which I require the most satisfactory answers. Why did you not explain your object to the first sentinel by whom you were challenged at the entrance of the grove?"

"The challenge took place so abruptly," replied the Countess,—"the man appeared and then vanished with such exceeding suddenness—that I was more or less confused and bewildered—though I will confess that within a very few minutes after I had passed by the post of that sentinel, I regretted that I had not been explicit; and I made up my mind to communicate my object on the very next convenient occasion. But when challenged by another sentinel—and then afterwards by others again—I endeavoured to induce them to listen to my speech, they peremptorily cut me short by exclamations commanding silence; and thus was I borne on by a flood of circumstances over which it absolutely seemed as if I had lost all control."

"All this has arisen," said De Sarsfeldt gravely, "from that confusion on your part which prevented you from giving the requisite explanations to the first sentinel. I see that you wear the golden spurs of knighthood. Full young are you to enjoy the high privileges of chivalry: but still are you old enough to be held responsible for your conduct:—and what knight can without a blush confess that duties have been neglected on account of a confusion of ideas, which if I were to adopt the severest construction, might be explained by the single word—*terror*?"

"As I live," exclaimed the Countess of Morton, "there was no terror in my soul—for what had I done, or what was I doing, to render me afraid? On the contrary, I was fluttering myself that these were good offices which I was performing, and that

instead of being made prisoner with a drawn sword on either side of me—compelled to answer questions like a felon—I should at least receive decent treatment, with a word or two expressive of thankfulness, for thus travelling out of my way to visit a spot and a chieftain both alike utterly unknown to me."

There was so much graceful dignity in the mien, the tone, and the language which the Countess now adopted—and so happy was she in substituting an air of self-possession, slightly indignant, instead of her more habitual demeanour of jaunty joyousness and levity, that she failed not to make an impression on all those who heard her. The knights looked at each other as if they felt that *they* were as much placed in a false position as the seeming young warrior himself, by the untoward incident of the evening. So likewise felt Sir Herman; for he said, "The situation is an anomalous one for us all; and no one can deplore it more than myself. The truth is, Sir Knight, you have been led onward by a chain of incidents to become an intruder—though evidently an unwilling, or at least an unintentional one—in the midst of us, while we were engaged in holding a solemn Chapter with all its forms and ceremonies. You have thus become a witness of our proceedings, and have been initiated into some of our mysteries. Such was not the intention of the wounded despatch-bearer when he made known to you the secret word and signs by which you might obtain admission into my presence. It is my duty to inform you, Sir Knight, that for any one playing the part of an intentional interloper and wilful intruder, the penalty is *death*! But in your case it were most ungracious on our side to have even the appearance of threatening you for a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. We must, however, trust, to a great extent, unto your own courtesy to release us as well as *yourself* from the awkwardness and embarrassment of the present position."

"Now that your language, Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt," returned the Countess of Morton, "assumes a strain so gracious and affable, I cannot for a minute hesitate to promise that everything which knightly courtesy on my part can achieve, shall be quickly and readily accomplished."

"Nothing less did I expect from your lips, Sir Knight, than such an assurance as this," resumed De Sarsfeldt. "We require from you a solemn oath, to the effect that you will henceforth and for ever maintain an inviolable secrecy with regard to the rites and mysteries whereof you have this evening been a witness?"

"Although a simple request on your part to that effect," responded the Countess, "would with me have as much weight as the most binding of oaths, yet have I not the slightest objection to comply with your demand."

"Accept my gratitude, Sir Knight," said De Sarsfeldt, "for this fresh demonstration of courtesy on your part. But I have still another favour to solicit—"

"Speak, and it shall be granted," returned the Countess.

"As you may perceive, Sir Knight," continued De Sarsfeldt, "we of the Teutonic Order are disciplined by certain rules and governed by the laws of a particular system. Therefore, in the present case, we are bound to observe a special ceremony in receiving the oath from your lips. May I request you, Sir Knight, to remove your helmet?"

"Willingly," replied the Countess: and as she suited the action to the word, she revealed her handsome well-formed head, with its clusters of rich brown hair, to the assembled knights.

"That crimson scarf," said De Sarsfeldt, "should now be lifted from your shoulder."

This also the Countess at once assented to; and taking off the scarf which she had received from the wounded courier, she handed it to one of the knights.

"Now be kind enough to kneel," said De Sarsfeldt,—"not in homage to us who are here present, because we pretend not to be more than your equals; but a suppliant posture is in some instances the most fitting one for the purposes of an oath."

The Countess knelt accordingly.

"Your sword, being ungirt from your waist," continued De Sarsfeldt, "may be placed before you on the ground in order to symbolize the cross by which you are presently to swear."

Louisa unfastened her sword-belt in a moment, and placed the weapon on the ground before her, according to the instructions which she had just received from the Teutonic chieftain.

"Thus far, Sir Knight," proceeded the latter, "has your courtesy enabled us to carry these forms which are indispensable for the administration of an oath under present circumstances. But now we have to make a still greater demand upon your goodness and forbearance,—though I experience all the less embarrassment in explaining the next step that is to be taken, seeing and considering that we have your knightly pledge to the effect that our requisitions shall be complied with. It is this,—that you be divested of your steel shirt of mail, or hauberk—that your breast be laid bare—and that with the points of two swords touching the naked flesh, you swear never to reveal the secrets and mysteries of our holy Order, under penalty of having your heart stabbed through and through by the avenging swords of the Teutons!"

The Countess of Morton became deadly pale as she listened to the latter portion of this speech: her looks were cast down, and she felt a frightful bewilderment how to act.

"But this is not all," continued Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt. "The ceremony of baring the breast is not merely to render the presentation of the swords' points all the more impressive and awe-inspiring as a ceremony—but likewise to afford proof that it is no female who has obtained admission amongst us. For by the laws of our Order it is *death* for any woman, habited in masculine disguise, to penetrate amongst us when sitting in solemn Chapter!"

If Louisa was bewildered and perplexed by the former portion of De Sarsfeldt's speech, all her feelings were now strung to a far higher degree of tension, and a mortal terror seized upon her. Her form was petrified—her tongue was palsied.

"Unfasten the hauberk of this courteous young Knight," said Herman de Sarsfeldt.

"No! never!" ejaculated the Countess, springing up to her feet. "Your outrages have already gone too far—"

"You must submit, Sir Knight," interrupted Herman de Sarsfeldt sternly: "or else force must be adopted!"

"You dare not!" exclaimed Louisa, now almost wild with terror and with an utter inability to command her self-possession.

De Sarsfeldt made one slight brief sign to the two knights who were specially charged with the custody of the Countess; and in a moment they seized upon her. She writhed and struggled in their grasp, while quick ejaculations, half passionate, half entreating, burst from her lips. Her conduct now suddenly began to excite a suspicion in the minds of those present—a suspicion which indeed was so close upon the actual truth, that it only rendered the two knights in whose arms she was struggling,

all the more determined to clear up the mystery.

"Stop! stop!" she exclaimed, in wild accents of despair, at the instant when the hauberk was about to be torn off her: "I confess that I am a woman! Spare me! spare me!"

Just at the time that this portion of the scene was taking place, an individual, having sprung from his horse on the open space outside the tent, was hastily going through the necessary ceremonies with the sentinel in order to obtain admission. That individual was none other than the despatch-bearer himself.

"The word?" demanded the sentinel.

"The Crimson Cross," was the reply; and the new-comer made the appropriate sign.

"The token?" asked the sentinel.

As the new-comer had no crimson scarf on his own person, he having given it to the Countess of Morton, he pointed significantly to the one which the sentinel himself wore.

"Pass, Crimson Cross!" said the latter.

The canvass curtain was drawn aside—the purple velvet drapery parted in the midst—and the despatch-bearer found himself in the pavilion. One glance showed him the scene exactly as it was at the moment when the Countess of Morton's voice pealed forth the confession that she was a woman.

"My sister! my sister!" exclaimed the new-comer: and rushing forward, he caught the bewildered and half fainting Countess in his arms. "Look up, Louisa! look up! I am your brother!—yes, your brother, Louis Carlyon!"

CHAPTER LIX.

THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

WE may here pause a moment to observe that although there were upwards of five hundred Teutonic Knights encamped in the valley of the Leven, yet that only about two hundred were sufficiently spared from duty to assist at the ceremonies of a Chapter of the Order. Every chieftain amongst the Teutons had the privilege of calling such a Chapter,—which was indeed but little different in purpose from an ordinary Council of War, but which was encumbered in its mode of procedure with a variety of ceremonies and mysteries, as the reader has perceived. There were Grand Chapters and Little Chapters: the former were held only by the Grand Master when surrounded by all his Court—the latter were those which any chieftain entrusted with a command had the privilege of summoning. As a matter of course the Sovereign-Prince of the Teutons might be present for special purposes at Little Chapters as well as at Grand Chapters; because it was not his presence simply that conferred the higher degree upon one of these meetings—for a Grand Chapter was only so called when previously announced to be such, and when accompanied, as we have said, with all pomps and ceremonies.

The Teutons were no longer a mere religious sect: they were a veritable nation. Though in their modes of addressing each other, as well as in their public speeches and documents they maintained the denomination of a *brotherhood*, yet this was only a mere fiction or form which had become traditional since the time when they received their constitution, so to speak, from Pope Clement. Yes—they were veritably a *nation*,—occupying vast territories—owning Marienburg as their capital—able to bring into the field an army of two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men—and with a popula-

tion occupying sixty large cities and towns, twenty thousand villages, and fifty fortified castles. The army was divided into regiments; and consequently there were infinite varieties of uniform. The crimson cross was only marked upon the cowls of the warriors of the higher grade; and thus perhaps there were not altogether one-tenth portion of the Teutonic army of two hundred and fifty thousand men whose breasts were honoured with that emblem. At the original institution of the Order, all its members were knights, and all wore the crimson cross upon their breast-plates: but as the number of the Teutons increased, it was found necessary to establish grades and distinctions, and to designate these by such varieties of embellishment, uniform, and apparel, as might seem most expedient at the time when each fresh development of Teutonic power took place. But still, throughout the entire army, there were two emblems which universally prevailed, and which the meanest possessed as well as the greatest. These were the crimson scarf and the crimson plume (or tuft as the case might be) upon the helmet. Those of superior rank wore silken scarves and had entire plumes of feathers; those of inferior degree wore scarves made of a coarse material, and mere tufts upon their casques. The Grand Master was accustomed to appoint a considerable number of equerries, who either remained attached to his person or else were sent on special services, and whose duties may be to a considerable extent likened to those of aides-de-camp belonging to the staff of a general of an army at the present day. These equerries to whom we are now alluding, were distinguished not merely by the richness of their armour, but also by their red scarves being lined with blue silk;—and this, be it remembered, was one of the characteristics which indicated the superior rank of the commander of the little squadron which had escorted Margaret from the grove near Dalkeith to Dumbarton Castle. Squires and pages attendant upon the Grand Master, were of lower degree than the equerries; but yet they enjoyed much consideration amongst the Teutons generally.

Louis Carlyon, the brother of the Countess of Morton, was a squire attached to the service of Prince de Salza. He had renounced his own name on entering into the Teutonic service; and he now bore that of Conrad Rossel; for all persons, when taking arms beneath the banner of the Crimson Cross, abjured everything pertaining to their native land, and abandoning their family nomenclature, took Germanised appellations without the slightest reference to those names which they thus cast off. Now, it was through no want of precaution on Conrad Rossel's part that the Countess of Morton became involved in so serious a dilemma as that which we have recorded. In the first place, Conrad, when he entrusted her with the mission, could not possibly have foreseen that General de Sarsfeldt would be holding a Chapter at that precise moment: the communication of the signs and tokens was only intended as the means of enabling the seeming young Knight to obtain prompt access to the General's presence; and if Louisa had mentioned her object to the first sentinel whom she encountered, all would have been well. It was this single omission—this one inadvertence, which proved the first link of the circumstances that had led her on step by step to the catastrophe in which her sex was discovered. The several sentinels whom she passed, finding that she gave the proper signs and watchwords, naturally concluded that she was initiated in the mysteries of that degree which possessed the privilege of a seat in the Little Chapter. And as if nothing should be wanting to con-

firm this belief on their part, she wore the Teutonic scarf and she had crimson plumes in her helmet! The absence of the cross from the cowl was nothing, inasmuch, as we have already said, there were immense numbers of the Teutonic warriors who were not privileged to wear that holy emblem at all. In short, it requires but a mere glance at all these circumstances to comprehend the facility with which the unsuspecting Countess went gliding farther and farther on to the very brink of the precipice which was yawning to receive her.

A certain dignified calmness and cold imperturbability were the main characteristics of the members of the Teutonic Order: but now, within that pavilion in the Valley of the Leven, there was an extraordinary excitement. The discovery of the seeming Knight's sex had been so closely followed upon by the abrupt entrance of Conrad Rossel, proclaiming himself to be the lady's brother, and seizing her in his arms—that all this was indeed sufficient to move even the most tranquil and phlegmatic disposition. The Countess, who at the instant was half fainting with mingled terror and a sense of shame, started as if animated with the fire of a new life; and flinging a glance upon her brother's countenance, she at once recognised him notwithstanding that some years had passed since last she had seen him, and that all the lower part of his face was buried in a glossy black beard. She flung her arms round his neck; and now through excess of emotion she fainted outright.

When the Countess of Morton regained her consciousness, she found herself still supported in her brother's arms; but it was not in the same place where her eyes had last closed upon the light. They were now in a small tent; and they were alone together. For a few moments Louisa could scarcely persuade herself that it was all otherwise than a wild fantastic dream: but when she acquired the certainty that everything which floated in her brain was real and substantially true, she was seized with the most poignant suspense, as she exclaimed, "Am I free, Louis? or am I a prisoner? Ah! I read your answer in your looks! Yes—I am a prisoner! I am still in the encampment—"

"Compose yourself, Louisa!" her brother hastened to reply: "compose yourself, I beseech you! It is true that you are not for the moment free to leave the encampment—"

"Good God, Louis!" said the wretched Countess, now feeling as if a tremendous consternation were seizing upon her: "you are preparing me for something dreadful!—your looks are ghastly and haggard—"

"Remember the accident, Louisa!—think of the blood that I lost!—reflect how unfit I was to perform this rapid journey!"

"Oh, then you are not pale with horror at the thought that my life is to be sacrificed? Ah!" ejaculated the Countess; "the words—the fearful words still ring in my ears!—*By the laws of the Order it is death for any woman, habited in masculine disguise—*"

"Yes, yes—I know the law!" said her brother: "but fear not!—the extreme penalty will not be inflicted upon you!—the holy saints forbid!"

"Oh, then there is the danger!" cried the Countess. "I am in the power of those fierce men! I am at their mercy!—my life depends upon their good will and pleasure!"

"Not upon their's, Louisa," interrupted Conrad Rossel—for so we shall continue to denominate him: "they dare not decide in such a case as this!—nor would they attempt to do so—for De Sarsfeldt, though stern and severe, is just and upright—"

"And he will not doom me to die?" exclaimed

the Countess, with an infinite sense of relief. "But he must pardon me altogether—he must set me free—"

"Alas! he has not the power of pardon," responded her brother. "That prerogative belongs to a far higher authority—"

"You frighten me, Louis!" ejaculated the Countess, who was as pale as death. "What higher authority do you mean? Must I remain a prisoner, while that high personage, whoever he may be, is communicated with?"

"'Twill be but a detention of a few hours, Louisa. To-morrow morning that personage will either be here or in the neighbourhood—"

"To-morrow morning?" echoed the Countess impetuously: "but I cannot wait! You talk of hours!—minutes to me are precious! Go tell that General of your's—go proclaim to this Herman de Sarsfeldt, that it is no humble female whom he is thus arbitrarily treating—aye, and most ungratefully so!—tell him it is the Countess of Morton!"

"What?" ejaculated Conrad Rossel: "you, Louisa?"

"Yes—the Countess of Morton!" she answered proudly,—"wife of one of the loftiest peers of Scotland!"

"Then a thousand, thousand times more welcome, Louisa, is this meeting," exclaimed her brother, joy animating the countenance which was hitherto so pale and haggard in consequence of his accident,—"yes, a thousand times more welcome, because you are a lawfully wedded wife!"

It was with the most impassioned sincerity that the Teutonic warrior strained his sister to his breast anew; and the tears rolled down his cheeks as his mental glances were flung over the past, which was fraught with so much to be deplored in reference to the family to which he belonged.

"And now that you know, dear brother, who I am," resumed Louisa hastily, "you will speed to that chieftain—will you not?—you will declare my name—you will demand my immediate liberation—"

"But tell me, Louisa," interrupted her brother, with an expression of painful mistrust fitting over his countenance,—"what means this masculine apparel—this armour—this disguise?"

"It is all too long to explain to you now, dear brother!" cried the Countess, who could not at the moment hit upon any plausible tale to satisfy the query which had been put. "Suffice it for me to state that it is of the utmost consequence I should proceed at once to Dumbarton Castle—"

"Is your husband there, Louisa?" inquired her brother, with quickness of accent and penetrating keenness of look.

"No," she responded, not daring to give utterance to a falsehood which she knew in a few hours, more or less, could be so easily detected. "But why do you ask?"

"Because, Louisa," rejoined Conrad, his looks now becoming full of severity, "if you be really bent on a visit to Dumbarton, your husband ought to be there; for the King of Scotland is now within the walls of that fortress!"

"I know it," answered the Countess. "But, my dear brother, we have no time for argument now! To-morrow—"

"Ah, Louisa! I do not force me to believe," ejaculated Conrad, almost fiercely, "that your marriage has been accompanied by no moral reformation! Do not interrupt me! Hear me, I insist! Years have elapsed since you and I met: and doubtless during the interval you have thought me dead? Aye!—and heaven knows that every urgent motive had I for remaining dead to my own family! And

thus dead, too, should I have continued, had not accident thrown us together to-night. Ah! look back, Louisa, as I have ere now been forced to retrospect when straining you in my arms,—how stood it with my family at the time when goaded by a sense of the degradation brought upon our name, I left the English army to seek fortune elsewhere at the sword's point? One brother was killed in a drunken fray—another was hanged as a spy. Then, of three sisters whom I possessed—"

"Louis, Louis!" interrupted the Countess of Morton, stamping her foot with impatience: "these recapitulations, so galling—so useless—"

"Nay—but I *will* finish!" interrupted Conrad, with a sternness that at once predominated over that manifestation of self-will on the part of his sister. "I have my reasons and motives for thus speaking; and you must listen! I was about to say of my three sisters, two contracted low and degrading marriages,—one with a ruined spendthrift, the other with a lacquey!—and you, Louisa, the third of those sisters, became the mistress of the Scottish King! All this is true—is it not? And I therefore renounced name—country—friends—everything, because of the dishonour which had fallen upon my family! For though, thank heaven! in me that name was never tarnished,—yet did I feel full sorely that an unjust and censorious world included me within the sphere of degradation which my relatives had raised up like a pestilential vapour around themselves! I fled therefore from you all!—I fled from the shades of my perished brothers—I fled from my two sisters who had contracted derogatory marriages—I fled from you, Louisa, who had become the mistress of the Scottish King! And now that accident has again thrown us together,—now that I so unexpectedly meet a sister—Oh, let this sister be enabled to look me in the face without a blush!—let her not have to tell me that forgetful of the vows she pledged to her husband at the altar, she is about to seek at Dumbarton her royal paramour!"

While Conrad Rossel was thus speaking in tones that varied with impressiveness, agitation, and tender emotion, his selfish sister had ample time to regain all her self-possession, and to fling a mental glance over the circumstances by which she was surrounded. She listened until her brother had finished, that from his speech itself she might obtain a suggestion or cue for the pretext and explanations it would be necessary to advance in order to set his mind at rest.

"Good heavens, my dear Louis!" she cried, flinging into her countenance not merely the air but also the flush of indignation; "how can you thus cruelly suspect me?—do you imagine that of all the Carlyon family a sense of virtue subsists in your breast only? May I not have been the victim of circumstances when I became the mistress of the Scottish King?—may I not have gladly sought an issue from that false and degrading position by means of an honourable marriage?"

"Oh, Louisa! if I may believe you!" exclaimed Conrad, with a look which showed how fervently he desired that he might be enabled to look upon her as a reformed being. "But that masculine garb—"

"A mere hunting dress, Louis!" she interjected,—"such as my husband the Earl has ever loved to see me wear."

"Ah, well," said Conrad; "if it be with your husband's knowledge and permission—But then this journey *without* your husband?"

"Listen, dear Louis!—for from you I can have no secrets!"—and the Countess, taking her brother's hand, pressed it in her own, while she gazed with

assumed tenderness upon his features. "I am about to reveal to you a very great mystery. There is a certain lady—I do not think I ought to tell you her name—who pretends that the King has secretly espoused her—"

"Some poor half-witted creature, doubtless?" interjected Conrad.

"Exactly so," exclaimed his sister: "she is indeed weak in the brain. She was placed under my care at Dalkeith Castle. Ah! perhaps you do not know that Dalkeith belongs to the noble Earl my husband; and I, by marriage, have become a Scottish subject—and consequently am bound to obey the bidding and study the interests of the Scottish King."

"Assuredly—in all honourable ways," observed Conrad. "Proceed, Louisa. What of this half-witted creature?"

"She has fled from Dalkeith—she has made her escape—she knows that the King will be to-morrow at Dumbarton Castle—she is shrewd and cunning in her madness—and methodical withal—"

"Ah! I begin to understand!" exclaimed Conrad: "you were pursuing the fugitive?"

"Yes—at the utmost of my speed," rejoined Louisa; "for it is well-nigh a matter of life and death with me!"

"Nay—not so, sister!" interjected the Teutonic warrior: "those terms are too vehemently and passionately spoken! King David cannot care so much about a half-witted woman; and you cannot have been guilty of so great a crime as to be apprehensive of aught beyond a black look or a few syllables of reproach."

"But on the part of one's Sovereign," cried the Countess vehemently, "one would infinitely rather receive a smiling glance and a word of approval!"

"Louisa," said Conrad Rossel sternly, "remember that he whom you now call your Sovereign, has been your paramour; and by all you are telling me—by your looks and by your manner—I could wish for your honour's sake that his glances should henceforth be so severe and his rebukes so bitter as to render you desirous of placing a hundred leagues between yourself and him, rather than thus gadding about, with strange disguises, in his service."

"Well, Louisa," ejaculated the Countess, now perceiving the necessity of going upon another tack, "if I pledge myself that I will leave the half-witted creature to her fate, and that on quitting the encampment I will return with all possible expedition to Dalkeith—"

"Were you to tell me that you would set off hence for the sake of being crowned Queen of Scotland, or of England, or of Ireland—or of all three kingdoms put together," responded Conrad impressively, "I have it not in my power to procure your liberation."

"What! and you call yourself my brother?" exclaimed the Countess, now wringing her hands—and it was not altogether with a feigned despair: "and you have forgotten that if I now find myself in this trouble, it is all on your account—and if I had not, when utterly unsuspecting who you were, undertaken your message to this encampment through sheer kindness and good-nature, I should ere now have arrived safely at my destination!"

"Louisa," ejaculated the Teutonic warrior, "providence itself interposed to save you from the ignominy of proceeding to Dumbarton Castle, where you purposed to meet that royal voluptuary who years ago seduced you from the path of virtue, and who, I fear—alas! I fear, has still too great a hold upon your heart!"

"Louisa," exclaimed the Countess, her eyes flashing fire, "every syllable you utter is an outrage and

an insult! I swear to you that since my marriage—"

"Say no more, Louisa!" interrupted her brother.

"If there be truth and sincerity in you, it were really an outrage on my part to exact an oath from your lips: and if you meant to speak falsely, it were better for your soul's salvation that your words should remain unsaid."

"Then you believe me, Louis?" responded the Countess, now relapsing into the most complete feminine mildness and into the tenderness of a sisterly cajolery. "What will you do for me? Are you not a Teutonic Knight?"

"No," he replied: "I bear not the title of knighthood. Look! my spurs are not of gold—they are of silver. I am a squire in the service of a chief of high degree."

"And this chief," interjected the Countess,—"can you not intercede with him on my behalf?"

"Tis he who to-morrow must decide your fate, Louisa. But he is merciful—he is just—and he is grateful! When he learns all the circumstances, and is informed how you became involved in this dilemma, he will pardon you—he will grant you your liberty."

"Woe, then, is this great chief of your's," demanded the Countess haughtily, "who dictates his own laws upon the Scottish soil?—who is it that arrogates to himself the power of directing the issues of life and death in respect to a Scottish peeress?"

Conrad Rossel hesitated for a moment; and then he said, "Perhaps you may have heard of him; for he has been for the last two months in Scotland. He bears the name of Sir Casimir D'Este."

With all the varying emotions which were excited by this conversation, the colour had come back to Louisa's cheeks; but it now all in a moment left them—she suddenly grew ghastly pale, at the same time that she gave a quick spasmodic start—the ejaculation of "My God!" burst from her lips—and she seemed as if she were about to sink back into a state of insensibility.

"Blessed saints! what ails you now?" cried her brother, sustaining her in his arms.

"Sir Casimir D'Este?" she repeated, shuddering throughout her entire frame: and then with a wild shriek, she added, "Oh, if my life depend upon him, it is not worth an hour's purchase from the instant he shall learn that it is the false Sir Louis Carlyon—"

"Ah!" ejaculated Conrad: "and now I bethink me, how came you to bear that name?—how came you to take that name which was my own, and which ought only to be borne by me, if I thought fit to resume it? Tell me, Louisa!" he passionately demanded: "did you mean to disgrace that name likewise, as you had already disgraced your own, and as our brothers and sisters, each and all, degraded the name which they bore?"

"Do not question me, Louis," cried the wretched Countess: "but for God's sake save me!"

"Oh! you have been deceiving me, Louisa! you have been deceiving me!" ejaculated the Teutonic warrior. "It is distraction to think that I should have found a sister only to be compelled thus to upbraid her! Unhappy woman! in what intrigues and machinations have you been mixed up that you should thus tremble at the name of Sir Casimir D'Este? Ah! and if you only knew—"

But Conrad stopped short on the very threshold of revealing a secret which was not his own—and which, as the reader may surmise, involved the fact that Sir Casimir D'Este was none other than Prince de Salza, Grand Master of the Teutons.

"Listen, Louis," said the Countess, not perceiving,

in the agitation of her mind, that he thus interrupted himself. "That half-brained creature of whom I ere now spoke to you, is well known to Sir Casimir—he has befriended her—he has espoused her cause—I know not rightly why—"

"Then, by St. John of Jerusalem!" cried Conrad, thus ejaculating an oath that was common amongst the Teutons; "whatever cause Sir Casimir D'Este espouses, rest assured that it is the right one!—and if you have gone against it, woe, woe unto you!"

"Just heaven! then I am lost!" half-shrieked the miserable woman. "Oh! are there no means of escape? These walls are but canvass—"

She flew towards the opening of the tent: but her brother, springing after her, held her back, exclaiming, "Rash woman! what would you do? Know you not that you are in the midst of an encampment—that you cannot go forth without the proper watch-words—"

"I know them! I know all the signs and tokens!" cried Louisa vehemently. "You yourself told me them!"

"Insensate! The signs and tokens which are for the purpose of egress are very different from those which are for the purpose of ingress!"

"But you know them, Louis?—you know them?" urged the sister vehemently; "and you will explain them?"

"I would sooner perish, Louisa," answered her brother solemnly.

"On my knees, I beseech you!" she cried. "You will become an accessory to my murder!—Oh, your conduct would be fratricidal!"

"Rise, Louisa!—these appeals are useless:" and the Teuton, now stern and implacable, lifted up his sister from the suppliant position to which she had sunk down.

"My God!" she said, sinking upon a seat: "even my own brother abandons me!"

"No—I do not abandon you," he said; "but I remain firm in my own duty. You were present at some of our ceremonies and mysteries just now—and you may judge for yourself whether the oaths by which we of the Holy Order are bound may be lightly treated. No! I do not abandon you! A prisoner here you must remain; and I myself will seek Sir Casimir D'Este—I will throw myself at his feet—I will tell him that in you I have found a sister—and I will implore your life at his hands! He is merciful and forgiving where mercy may be righteously exercised—yes, and even where it is possible that by the straining of a point forgiveness may be shown! From your lips, Louisa, I ask no further explanations. Doubtless I shall hear from Sir Casimir himself the full tale of your iniquities, whatever they may be. Do not weep," added her brother, now speaking in a milder tone, for he was moved by his sister's tears—and the Countess was now indeed weeping with no feigned affliction.

At this moment the canvass curtain of the tent was thrust aside; and Janet Lockyer was pushed in by a tall Teutonic warrior, who exclaimed indignantly, "Go, brazen one! disguised in a garb that becomes you not!—and join your still more hardened mistress!"

The warrior disappeared as the canvass curtain again fell over the opening of the tent; and Janet, throwing herself upon the ground at the feet of the Countess, exclaimed in a wild paroxysm of grief, "Oh, what will they do with us? Into what dire calamities has your ladyship brought me?"

"Ah, then, you have a female attendant?" ejaculated Conrad: and as a light flashed in unto his mind, he exclaimed, "Ah, doubtless the seeming page who so kindly ministered to me at the woodman's hut, was likewise of the gentler sex? How-

ever, I now leave you to yourselves. Be not without hope! I will do for you all that it lies in mortal power to accomplish!"

Having thus spoken, Conrad rushed from the tent, unable to endure any longer the spectacle of his sister's woe.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PRISONERS IN THE TENT.

THE Countess of Morton soon felt ashamed of displaying so much weakness in the presence of Janet Lockyer; and she moreover felt that it was her duty to reassure and console the young woman whom she had induced to leave a comfortable home and the paternal protection at Dalkeith in order to become a partaker in her own knight-errandries. The Countess accordingly hastened to dry her tears; and she spoke soothingly as well as encouragingly to the damsel. She gave a rapid outline of all that had happened to herself after she and Janet were separated near the entrance of the tent; and she revealed the startling fact that in the wounded courier she had found a brother. Thus Janet now for the first time learnt that the individual who had just taken his departure from the tent, was the same whom they had fallen in with in the wood sixteen miles distant; and the reader must not be astonished that Janet did not recognise him—for let it be borne in mind that when the meeting first took place in that wood, the deep obscurity which prevailed prevented any one from obtaining aught more than a very partial glimpse of his countenance.

Janet was considerably reassured on learning that her mistress had found a brother in the midst of these persons into whose power they had fallen; and the Countess was now careful to say nothing which might discourage or weaken the hope which the damsel felt in respect to the issue of the adventure. So far as concerns the explanations which Janet herself had to give, a few words will suffice to make them known to the reader. On being separated from her mistress she was conducted to a large tent, where she found herself in the midst of a number of pages, some of whom were eating and drinking—others were gaming with dice—and others were indulging in blithe and joyous discourse. Janet was conducted towards a table spread with refreshments, where she was welcomed by those who were already paying their respects to the comestibles;—and in the same way that her mistress had been looked upon by the warriors in the pavilion as one of themselves, so was Janet Lockyer treated by the pages into the midst of whom she was introduced. But all of a sudden she was accosted by the sentinel who had conducted her thither; and she was desired to follow him. She trembled lest there might be something wrong; for his countenance wore a singular expression. Leading her into an adjacent tent which was previously unoccupied, the sentinel at once abruptly communicated the fact that her mistress's secret was discovered; and then Janet, falling upon her knees, implored the warrior's mercy. This was sufficient to convince him in reference to the sex of the suppliant damsel; and he proceeded with the least possible delay to conduct her to the tent to which the Countess had been borne by her brother, and into which the affrighted and afflicted Janet was thrust in the manner described at the close of the preceding chapter.

Such were the explanations which the damsel gave to the Countess of Morton: and the latter re-



peated the language of hope and reassurance to as great an extent as she dared venture. The lady and her follower lay down to rest: slumber soon stole over the eyes of Janet, who was wearied in body as well as mentally oppressed; but Louisa could not so readily woo the balmy repose that might steep her own senses in oblivion. She was constrained perforce, as it were, to envisage all the circumstances of her position. That Margaret was already at Dumbarton or would soon be there, she had no doubt. That Margaret would see Sir Casimir D'Este so soon as he himself arrived there, was an equal certainty in the painful calculations of Louisa's mind. The questions therefore were—to what extent all her own treachery might be known to Margaret? and to what degree Sir Casimir might thus be prejudiced against her? But on these points she scarcely dared hope for much. No!—on the contrary, she felt inclined to augur the very worst; and it was with a strong poignant shudder she thought to herself, “If Margaret be vindictive, and if Sir Casimir be implacable, it will go hard with me!—my God, it will go hard with me!”

The Countess of Morton made not the slightest attempt to escape from the Teutonic encampment: she knew only too well that her brother must have spoken with the strictest accuracy when he showed her the futility of any such endeavour. She therefore lay by the side of Janet Lockyer, giving way to her painful reflections, until at length slumber stole upon her eyes. But even then imagination's realm, into which she was wafted, became peopled with phantom shapes and nameless objects of terror; so that her sleep was uneasy and restless—and when she awoke in the morning, she felt as depressed and as exhausted as if she had not closed an eye throughout the live-long night.

The rough voice of some Teutonic menial was presently heard just outside the tent, announcing to the prisoners that if they thrust their hands forth from the canvass curtain they would find the means of ablation and refreshment in readiness. Janet hastened to procure these objects, the nature of which indicated the most thoughtful attention; so that the Countess felt sure her brother had not forgotten to speak on her behalf ere he left the encampment. There were basins and ewers of water: the little valises which were strapped on to the saddles which the two disguised females bestrode, and which contained their toilet-necessaries, were likewise placed at the opening of the tent, and in addition to these objects there was a basket containing the means for a most excellent repast.

And now let the reader bear in mind that we have brought the incidents of this episode to the morning of that day on which the memorable proceedings took place at Dumbarton. But while all was bustle and excitement within the walls of that fortalice, and while the lapse of time was there being characterized by a rapid succession of the most startling incidents—it was very different within the canvass walls of the tent constituting the prison of the Countess of Morton and Janet Lockyer. There, in that tent in the Valley of the Leven, slowly passed the hours: full of anxiety and suspense were they; and never to either the mistress or her damsel did time appear to drag itself onward with so leaden a foot. Janet again grew deeply desponding: the Countess on the other hand became irritable and restless, until at length she scarcely even took the trouble to give utterance to a word of reassurance or solace to her afflicted companion. Yes,—the hours were passing; and Louisa's brother returned not! What could be the reason? why was he thus detained? The Countess endeavoured to persuade herself that everything was for the

best, and that when her brother *did* reappear, it would be to announce the joyous intelligence that she was free: but it was by no means so easy thus to banish all apprehension and terror. Therefore, while the hours were dragging their slow length along, the Countess of Morton continued a prey to the most painful misgivings, which often seemed to be about to rise into the wildest terrors. At length, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, the canvass curtain of the tent was drawn aside, and Conrad Rossel made his appearance.

“Brother! dearest brother!” exclaimed the Countess of Morton, springing forward with the most feverish suspense; “what tidings do you bring? Oh, my God! your look is moody and sombre!”

“Oh, my poor father! my poor father!” murmured Janet, sinking upon her knees and clasping her hands in utter despair.

“Sister,” said Conrad, “you must hope everything from the merciful consideration of those whom you have offended! At present nothing is decided with regard to your case! But with you I am different! Rise—cheer up! You are safe—you are free! I have brought the order for your liberation!”

It was with a wild cry of joy that Janet sprang to her feet: she endeavoured to give utterance to some words of thankfulness to the bearer of this welcome intelligence—but she could not, and she sank weeping with emotion into the arms of the Countess.

“You will not leave me, Janet? you will not leave me?” repeated Louisa, now feeling that the presence of a female companion, even of inferior degree, was an immense solace in the midst of her misfortunes.

“No, dear lady,” ejaculated the good-hearted damsel, “I will not leave you unless I am compelled!”

“You need not quit your mistress,” interjected Conrad Rossel. “Oh, Louisa! how was it possible that you could have lent yourself to the King's vile machinations? Everything is now seen through!—and you who might have been a friend of Scotland's Queen—”

“Queen?” ejaculated the Countess, with a sudden start. “But no! it is impossible! If you have seen Margaret, she has deceived you, Louis!—or rather I should say, she herself still labours under that delusion of a valid marriage—”

“Silence, Louisa! silence!” exclaimed her brother, with a look of mingled scorn, pity, and disgust. “You know not what you are saying!—still less do you know what you have lost by your flagitious conduct! Ah! it is only too easy to comprehend how you consented to play the part of the King's creature—”

“For heaven's sake reproach me not so bitterly, Louis!” cried the Countess. “Look! in the presence of this girl, too!—But, Oh! tell me—what has happened?”

“This is what has happened, Louisa,” said Conrad. “That poor crack-brained creature—that half-witted woman, whom you were appointed to keep in custody, and who escaped from the Castle of Dalkeith—”

“What bitter irony in your words, Louis!” murmured the Countess.

“Aye—and what confusion for you, Louisa,” ejaculated her brother, “when you learn that Margaret laboured under no delusion—that the marriage was valid—and that she is Scotland's Queen!”

“Good heavens! is this possible?” exclaimed the Countess. “And I—insensate that I have been!—”

"More wicked than insensate!" returned her brother, in a tone of the most bitter reproachfulness; "for you have not even the apology of insanity's ungovernable impulse—but you have all along acted deliberately, steadily, and wilfully!"

"Oh, my God! do not revile and taunt me!" cried Louisa, clasping her hands: "am I not wretched enough already? Tell me, Louis—tell me,—is there indeed any hope that my life may be spared? Yes—it must be! This new-made Queen would never dare to inaugurate her reign with the death of a Scottish peeress!"

"It is not to either want of daring or powerlessness on Margaret's part, that you will owe your life," rejoined Conrad Rossel: "it will be to her mercy, her generosity, and her forbearance!"

"Oh, then, there is indeed hope!—every hope, Louis? You are confident? Yes, yes! I read it in your looks!" continued the Countess, with feverish excitement. "Perhaps you are even enabled to give me the positive assurance—"

"As yet I can assure you of nothing, sister," interrupted the brother. "Ah! but I have forgotten to make you an announcement of a startling character. Queen Margaret will do naught without consulting the illustrious chieftain who has helped her to ascend the Scottish throne—"

"Ah! doubtless you mean Sir Casimir D'Este?" ejaculated Louisa. "But, Oh! if Margaret, who is now a Queen, do but signify her will—if she raise but a finger on my behalf—Sir Casimir D'Este must deferentially submit—"

"Louisa," interjected her brother solemnly, "he of whom you speak, instead of being lower than Royalty, is on a par with Royalty's self! He is the Prince de Salza, Grand Master of the Teutonic Order to which I belong!"

Here was a new and startling surprise for the Countess of Morton, as well as indeed for Janet: but the former was now stricken with a new terror—for she fancied that if he whom she had previously known as Sir Casimir D'Este, was so powerful either to reward or to punish, he would be certain to exercise that power in a manner commensurate with the magnitude of the offence that had been given. Her brother instantaneously comprehended what was passing in her mind: and he hastened to say, "Did I not assure you last night that the mighty chief whom I serve is generous and merciful? It is in this generosity and in this mercy that you must now put your reliance! Indeed, Louisa, you need not despair! you may entertain every hope! I know his Highness Prince de Salza well; and it has always been in the hours of his greatest triumphs that I have seen him most forgiving."

The Countess took her brother's hand and pressed it with a powerful degree of emotion: but now another misgiving suddenly smote her. She again became pale as death; and bending upon him a despairing look, she murmured, "No, Louis—no! there is not any hope! I feel that I am lost! The chivalry of the man may forgive me: but the jealousy of the woman—never!"

Her voice sank to a low whisper as she thus spoke, so that Janet should not overhear what she said. Her brother comprehended what she meant; and a shade of uneasiness flitted for an instant over his countenance; but his features almost immediately brightened up, and he said, "From all I have heard, Louisa, Margaret is magnanimous and will not prove vindictive."

"No, no, Louis!" rejoined the sister: "Margaret is not magnanimous! She is strong-minded, I grant you; but it is her ambition that has made her so:—and is not ambition composed of all the elements of intensest selfishness? She cannot fail

to suspect—indeed she *must* know," continued the Countess, in a still lower voice than before, "that I have been the King's mistress:—and what wife ever forgives a woman situated as I am towards David? My God! I am lost!"—and now the wretched Countess, throwing herself upon the cushions which served as a pallet in the tent, gave way to a renewed paroxysm of grief, but wilder and more terrible than before.

Janet hastened to soothe, if possible, her unhappy mistress: while Conrad Rossel stood buried in deep reflection for several minutes. At length he suddenly started from his statue-like position; and catching his sister by the arm, he said, "Rise, Louisa—rise! I have something to suggest."

The Countess sprang up to her feet—hope again thrilled in her heart—and dashing away the tears from her eyes, she hastily whispered in her brother's ear, "I understand you, Louis—Oh, I understand you, dear Louis! You have remembered something which I in the agitation of my mind had forgotten! Yes, yes—the King will assist me! the King will save me! Go to him, Louis—speed—hasten—"

"Silence!" muttered the Teutonic warrior, with a fierce expression of scorn and disgust upon his countenance: "would you make me forget that you are my sister? By St. John of Jerusalem! I would sooner see you perish at the hands of my brethren of the Order—I would sooner behold the two sword-points pierce your bosom, than that I would undertake a shameful message to him who has been the author of *your* shame! No—never! Besides, Louisa, the King himself is powerless against the will of his Queen so long as she shall continue to be supported by my master Prince de Salza."

"Then what in the name of mercy do you suggest, Louis?" asked the Countess, in an agony of suspense: "what can I do to save my life?"

"That which you are to do," rejoined her brother, "shall prove alike your salvation and your punishment! In a word, wretched erring sister of mine! it is now for you to humble your proud spirit and pen a meek and lowly petition to Queen Margaret."

A quick flush appeared upon the countenance of Lady Morton; and for an instant she bit her lip almost till the blood came. But the next moment she again became pale as death: her spirit shrank aghast from its own rebellion—it quailed before the probable consequences of its own bold revolt. Writing materials were furnished her—she drew up the petition—and it was a singular but striking illustration of the mutability of human affairs, that she now addressed by the titles of "August Majesty" and "Gracious Sovereign," the very being whom but so short a time back she was striving to mock or overawe by means of a fleshless skull crowned with a brazen diadem!

CHAPTER LXL

THE BLACK EARL'S BRIDAL.

THE reader will not have forgotten that middle-aged, fierce-looking warrior who commanded the escort which conducted Margaret from the grove in the neighbourhood of Dalkeith to Dumbarton Castle. He was one of the equestries attached to the person of Prince de Salza; and, as may be conjectured from the special and delicate nature of the service thus entrusted to him, he was high in the confidence of his illustrious master. His name was Ernest de Zell. We should observe that Prince de Salza was

never accustomed to make confidants unnecessarily. If he had half-a-dozen special enterprises to be carried out at the same time, each individual of the six to whom they were respectively confided, would only be made acquainted with his own particular business, and would be allowed no insight into the missions confided to the others. De Salza, though accustomed to act rapidly and upon decisions promptly made, was exceedingly shrewd and cautious: he never communicated a secret unnecessarily—he never told to even his most devoted adherents any more than it was absolutely requisite for them individually or collectively to become acquainted with. Thus Herman de Sarsfeldt on one side, and Ernest de Zell on another—Jassent here, and Conrad Rossel there—each had only been permitted just so much insight into the matter specially entrusted to him as was needful for the due carrying out of the same; so that in this instance, as in many others, they were all destined to be more or less astonished at the grand aggregate results brought about by the separate and divided execution of the orders originally given.

We must remind our readers that at a particular stage of the proceedings of this memorable day of which we are still writing, Jassent had directed the Earl of Bassentyne to enter the audience-hall, and had bidden Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan repair to the vast building which in cases of siege was wont to be used as a granary. The Earl was sent to the hall that he might be separated from Fitz-Allan, and prevented from obtaining any knowledge of the part to be now entrusted to his friend, until the proper time should come. Fitz-Allan, on entering the granary, found—as he had been led to expect from the gossiping information of Sir Richard Mildmay—a thousand Teutonic warriors there assembled. Crowded were they indeed together; but still there was sufficient space for them to congregate temporarily in that species of ambush. Ernest de Zell exercised command over them until the arrival of Fitz-Allan; and then he at once intimated to the young Scottish Knight that he surrendered up the supreme authority into his hands. The mass of Teutonic warriors there assembled, had received a previous intimation of what was to take place in this respect; and on a signal being given by Ernest de Zell, they all presented arms to the youthful General whom the Scottish King had appointed some few weeks back, by the consent of Prince de Salza. Though this salute was made in profound silence, to prevent any untimely noise from being heard beyond the walls of the granary,—yet was there an unmistakable enthusiasm depicted on the countenances of the Teutons; for they had heard of the great proofs of valour already given by Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan and his very youthfulness, so far from chafing the spirits of those older warriors above whom he was placed, gave a species of chivalrous *clat* to the command that was now to be exercised over them. In addition to this generous feeling, we may add that they were all bound, alike by their oaths and their inclinations, to obey the slightest wish emanating from their adored Sovereign the Grand Master De Salza. Thus, all circumstances combined to render them willing and ready to bow to their young chieftain; while his own knightly appearance, his good looks, his air of mingled modesty and dignity, and the graceful courtesy with which he acknowledged their salute, tended to ratify the good opinion which the warriors had previously formed of him.

Sir Fleming now learnt from the lips of Ernest de Zell the startling intelligence that he whom he had hitherto known as the comparatively humble Knight Sir Casimir D'Este, was in reality none other than the Teutonic Sovereign himself. De Zell likewise

acquainted Fitz-Allan with the fact of his sister having been escorted from the neighbourhood of Dalkeith to Dumbarton on the preceding day: but he was not immediately informed of the special motives which had induced Prince de Salza to make arrangements to ensure the young lady's presence at the fortalice on the occasion. Sir Fleming was not however kept very long in suspense: for while he was still lost in wonderment and bewildering conjecture as to what all these things could mean, a trusty messenger arrived from the audience-hall with the still more astounding information that his sister had just been proclaimed by the Prince de Salza as the Scottish Queen! In the same way that the Earl of Caithness had already comprehended everything when that announcement was made in the audience-hall itself, so did Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan in the granary now penetrate at a glance all that was previously dark and mysterious in his sister's recent conduct. The thrilling joy which inspired him was however too great to allow much scope for deliberate reflection; and even when he began to collect his thoughts he was not permitted to pursue them to any lengthened strain, for events were now hurrying on with whirlwind rapidity. The pealing blast sent forth by Jassent's bugle reached Fleming's ear; and then Ernest de Zell at once prompted him what was to be done. This was to proceed at the head of his Teutonic warriors to surround the audience-hall, so as to be ready for all contingencies; and then a short time afterwards a messenger came to announce that the proper moment had arrived for him to enter the audience-hall itself with a few of his men, that a fitting body-guard might be formed for the illustrious prince who had just proclaimed himself to the startled assembly as the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order.

Having given these requisite explanations, we may now take up our narrative from the point where we recently broke it off to relate the episo- dical adventures of the Countess of Morton. At that point we stated how Margaret, on finding herself acknowledged to be Queen of Scotland, had sunk beneath the overpowering weight of her emotions and had fainted in the arms of the delighted Maude and the equally faithful tire-women. She was at once borne out of the gallery, and conveyed to the apartment where she had spent the night. Thither—on receiving an intimation which was hastily conveyed to her—sped the astonished and delighted Albertina. The young lady had arrived with her father at the castle on the preceding evening; but she had remained in the chamber allotted to her,—the Earl of Caithness not thinking it right that his virtuous and delicate-minded daughter should be present in the audience-hall while the Lady Elvira Ramsay was telling her tale of degradation and shame and proclaiming her wrongs against the Earl of Douglas.

And now, when Margaret awoke to consciousness, she found her head pillowed upon Albertina's bosom, and the sweet countenance of that charming maiden bending over her. Ferrid was the embrace in which the two young ladies were quickly clasped; and the newly recognised Queen whispered with much emotion, "Remember, dearest Albertina, that to you I am only Margaret still—and by no other name must you ever address me!"

The door of the chamber now again opened, and several noble ladies made their appearance. They were already known to Margaret, from having been present at the lists and at the banquet at Roslin Castle on the memorable day when her brother vanquished the Earl of Douglas. Profound was the homage which they proffered to the Queen; and the senior lady intimated that they came by the

King's command to bestow all suitable ministrations upon her. Four Teutonic pages had followed them, bearing a trunk which they placed upon the floor; and they then retired. The trunk was opened, and was found to contain the sumptuous robes of a female Sovereign, with a diadem of gold and a sceptre, both profusely embellished with precious stones. Margaret had no difficulty in comprehending that this was another proof of Prince de Salza's wondrous kindness towards her, as well as of that prescience and predetermination which had swayed all the proceedings that had resulted, under his marvellous direction, in establishing her claims and procuring her recognition as Scotland's Queen.

"His Gracious Majesty has commanded me to inform your Highness," said the senior lady, "that he longs for the happiness of personally paying his greetings, so soon as it may please your Highness to receive them."

A flush of indignation for a moment crossed Margaret's splendid countenance. She thought of all the detestable trickeries by which her royal husband had endeavoured to repudiate and ignore her as a wife: but that angry glow quickly passed away as the conviction flashed to her mind that David was now adopting a policy of conciliation. Margaret felt that she was at length a queen, not merely in name but in reality; and she could afford to banish the past from her recollection, and think only of the present and the future. She accordingly prepared to make such additions to her toilet as the costly contents of the mail-trunk so fully and completely enabled her to accomplish; and in this process she was assisted by her loving friend Albertina, and the peeresses who had already constituted themselves her ladies-in-waiting and maids-of-honour. But if in the course of this narrative we have succeeded in enabling our readers to comprehend the true character of Margaret, they cannot now fail to understand how much exultant pride and thrilling triumph there was in her soul—but on the other hand how successfully she veiled these feelings by that air of queenly dignity mingled with affability and condescension, which from her very nature as well as from her previous self-sufferings she was so ready to assume.

But let us now return to the audience-hall. We have already seen that the King had made up his mind to play the part of expediency, and even at the very twelfth hour to simulate the merit of yielding to the cause of justice, when it was no longer possible to withstand it. He had recognised Margaret as his Queen—he then displayed great concern on hearing that she had fainted in the gallery—and he lost no time in exclaiming aloud, "Surely, now that I have acknowledged the bride whom my assembled peers have, by their august decision, pronounced to be legitimately mine, there will not be wanting peeresses, and titled dames, and youthful ladies of rank to form her a fitting queenly retinue?"

The hint was promptly taken, and half-a-dozen noblemen who had brought their wives and daughters to Dumbarton Castle, pressed forward to proffer the services of those ladies. These were accepted; and Prince de Salza at the same time whispered in the ear of Jassent, "Now let the regal gifts be borne to the Queen's apartments."

The order was promptly executed: and, as we have already seen, the mail-trunk was in a few minutes conveyed by four Teutonic pages to its destination.

The King—having sent that conciliatory message to Margaret, which was delivered by the senior lady—exclaimed with a blithe off-hand air, "Ah, now methinks, my lords and gentlemen, it were but fitting and proper to accomplish a ceremony which would have been already fulfilled, were it not for the

grave, important, yet happily concluded proceedings which have for awhile thrown the others into the shade."

The Black Douglas—who understood full well that it was his marriage with the Lady Elvira to which the King alluded—looked dark as a thunder-cloud for a moment; and then suddenly changing his demeanour, he said with a low bow—all the more full of a bitter mockery because being thus low,—
"The proceedings must indeed have been fraught with no inconsiderable amount of happiness for your Majesty, inasmuch as your Grace prolonged them to the very fullest extent."

"I am rejoiced to find," responded the King, with an affability so pointedly courteous that from this very fact it constituted for the fierce soul of the Douglas the bitterest retaliation that could be possibly inflicted,—
"I am rejoiced to find that your lordship comprehends so well how happiness may be constituted in the wedded state; and we will not delay your felicity another moment. Come, my lords and gentlemen! let us hie hence to the chapel!—this bridal knot shall be tied forthwith. Ah! where is Father Julius?—for, in good sooth, naught can be accomplished without the useful presence of your lordship's chaplain."

Again the King flung a look of seeming kindness upon the Black Earl: but the latter affected not to catch the Monarch's eye this time.

Father Julius was forthcoming: a procession was formed—it proceeded to the chapel, which was quickly filled by those who had either a particular motive or else a mere curiosity for being present. But Prince de Salza, Fleming Fitz-Allan, the Earl of Bassentyne, and the Earl of Caithness, were amongst those who still remained in the audience-hall. It is not our purpose to dwell at any length upon the solemnization of the marriage-ceremony between the Earl of Douglas and the Lady Elvira Ramsay: suffice it to say that their hands were united in matrimony—and as the Douglas resolved to bide his time in the hope of wreaking a signal vengeance upon all his enemies, the King included, he shut himself up in a reserve, halt haughty, halt sullen—though from time to time flinging disdainful glances on his bride. She, on her part, now maintained a calm dignity—or at least the external semblance thereof; and she appeared not to notice those contemptuous looks on the part of the bridegroom. As for the King, from the moment that the Earl of Douglas ceased to adopt a hostile bearing, either overt or covert towards him, he re-assumed that air of graceful dignity and regal self-possession which he knew so well how to adopt. The instant the ceremony was concluded, the Earl of Douglas gave his hand to his bride, and passed out of the chapel without bestowing any more notice upon a single soul;—aye, even without inclining his head in fitting courtesy to the King. But the Countess of Douglas—as Elvira must now be termed—made a low reverence to the Monarch, and gracefully saluted the rest of the company present, as she went forth from the chapel with the Earl. The steeds, which his lordship had already commanded to be ready saddled, were waiting in the court-yard—his numerous attendants were prepared for the journey—and the Black Earl, escorting his bride and followed by his retainers, rode forth from Dumbarton Castle in profound silence.

Meanwhile, as we have already said, Prince de Salza, the Earl of Caithness, the Earl of Bassentyne, and Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan—for so we shall at present continue to call our young hero, although it was now known that he bore another surname) had remained together in the audience-hall. The Earl of Caithness had much for which to thank Prince

de Salsa—not only for his conduct towards Margaret, but likewise for having by some means utterly unknown to all around, obtained that royal document which repealed the decrees of the Black Parliament so far as they related to the descendants of Sir John Logie, and at the same time absolved him (the Earl of Caithness) from all the pains and penalties which he had entailed upon himself by his noble and magnanimous conduct in rearing, befriending, and harbouring Margaret and Fleming. Most fervid, therefore, were the acknowledgments which the Earl of Caithness expressed for the various advantages and benefits, boons and good deeds, of which Prince de Salsa was the source; and the Teutonic Sovereign replied in terms which were well calculated to convince the Earl of his desire that the friendship hitherto subsisting between them should be more strongly cemented than ever.

And now the Earl of Bassentyne deemed that the moment had come when he was bound to take a particular course in respect to the Earl of Caithness. He, therefore, requested this nobleman to step aside with him for a few minutes; and going forth from the audience-hall, they passed out into the adjacent court-yard. There they beheld the several ranks of the Teutonic warriors as these troops were defiling away towards the granary, barrack-rooms, and other places of accommodation now provided for them within the castle. The two Earls stood for some minutes to admire the martial bearing, the complete discipline, and the excellent appointments in respect to garb and weapons, of the troops that were thus passing away from their view. The countenance of the Earl of Bassentyne was animated with an heroic enthusiasm as he gazed upon the martial pageantry: but as he again turned towards the Earl of Caithness, a melancholy shade gradually came over his features.

"My dear Roland," said the Earl of Caithness, "it is quite natural that you should seek an early opportunity to hold parance with me, touching and concerning various matters of interest: but perhaps the present moment is the least opportune, inasmuch as we ought to hold ourselves in readiness to greet our young Queen when she shall come forth again from her apartments."

"Pardon me, my lord," interrupted the Earl of Bassentyne: "but no moment can be more opportune for that which I have to say than the present. Yes—there are many reasons—"

"What mean you, Roland?" exclaimed Lord Caithness. "Your looks are singular—"

"I am about to bid you farewell, my lord," responded the young Earl; "for I claim not the hand of your daughter—there is another whom the bestowal of that fair hand may render happy—he it is who is now the brother of a Queen!"

"Roland!" ejaculated the Earl of Caithness, with a start of mingled astonishment and indignation; "is it your purpose to insult me?—do you believe me so base as to forget or to recall my promises to you?"

"No, no, my lord," rejoined the Earl of Bassentyne, with much emotion; "you do not understand me! My heart has loved another—not the Lady Albertina Roslin—and the Lady Albertina Roslin herself has experienced for me no other feeling than that of friendship. Listen, I beseech you!—do not be impatient! do not be angry! Numerous circumstances have prevented the revelation of all these things before; but now, my lord, they must exist no longer as secrets for you. I give you back whatsoever pledges and promises you have made me on your daughter's account; and believe me, my lord, the happiness of that amiable young lady and my esteemed friend the chivalrous Fleming can best

be ensured by the union of their hands. For the mightiest noble in the universe could not now object to bestow his daughter on the brother of a Queen!"

"Is this so? is it indeed so?" asked the Earl of Caithness quickly, but in a musing manner; for what the question really implied was in reference to the loves of Fleming and Albertina, of which he now heard for the first time. "Doubtless it is so!" he then ejaculated, more audibly. "Yes—it is natural! they have been brought up together! But I, who never suspected—who never saw anything—I who fancied that they were like brother and sister—"

"And can you possibly regret, my lord, that the bravest youth in all Sootland—the Knight who has been selected to fill the proud position of commander of the Teutonic auxiliary,—can you regret, in short," demanded Roland earnestly, "that he whom you already loved as a son should now claim to become veritably so?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness, "if this were the only consideration—But Ah, Roland!" he suddenly interrupted himself, as an idea flashed to his mind; "this is a noble self-sacrifice that you are making on behalf of your friend!"

"No, my lord—no!" cried the young Earl; "such merit is not mine!—and I swear to you that in all which has now fallen from my lips there has been naught but the truth!"

Still the Earl of Caithness was incredulous; and seizing Roland's hand, he looked him earnestly in the face, saying, "Unless you give me some unquestionable proof, my young friend, that all you tell me is exact to the very letter, I must persist in believing that this is a noble act of friendship which you are performing;—and not for worlds would I either suffer your affections to be blighted, nor violate my own promises! Speak then, Roland! You said that you had loved another. Tell me who that other is—or was; for there seemed to be a mystery in your speech as you alluded to that point."

"Ah, my lord," responded Roland, an expression of anguish for an instant flitting over his countenance: but then it as quickly yielded to a look of mournful resignation; "I perceive that it is necessary to entrust you with my secret! Well, be it so! She whom I loved—she was until recently called Margaret Fitz-Allan—she is now the Queen of Scotland."

The Earl of Caithness first started, and then stood gazing in speechless wonderment.

"Farewell, my lord!" said Roland, suddenly seizing and pressing the hand of Albertina's father: and then he hurried away.

A few minutes afterwards he was riding forth from the castle, leaving his retinue to follow as speedily as they might be enabled to get their horses in readiness.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE QUEEN'S APARTMENT.

WE must remind our readers that very shortly after the combat between the Earl of Douglas and Fleming Fitz-Allan, Margaret had spoken to her brother, in reference to his love for Albertina. On that occasion she informed him that Albertina's hand had been promised to the Earl of Bassentyne; but at the same time she had with the utmost confidence assured him that the Earl's heart was not engaged to the young lady. On subsequent occasions she had repeated this assurance, but with-

out hinting at the ground upon which it was based; and Fleming was too much delighted with the declaration itself, and too much absorbed in his own dreams of bliss, to think of questioning his sister farther on the point. It was sufficient for him to have the conviction that his friend Roland had no thought of asserting a claim to the hand of Albertina—and he had asked no farther questions.

We have reverted to these facts inasmuch as they are calculated to account for something which took place between the two young men when walking together in the court-yard of Dumbarton Castle on the morning of the memorable day of which we are writing. Roland had spoken to Fleming in a vague manner of some one whom he had loved—of the blissful dream having been dissolved—and of the necessity of now considering that the object of his passion had become dead to him. Fitz-Allan had listened to him with mingled interest and surprise; and not for a single moment had he suspected that his own sister Margaret was the object of the hapless love to which his friend Roland was alluding.

While the Earl of Caithness and the Earl of Bassentyne were still conversing in the court-yard together, Prince de Salza, who was with Fleming in the audience-hall, suddenly beheld Conrad Rossel standing at a little distance and showing by his looks that he was anxious to have speech of his illustrious master. The Prince beckoned Conrad towards him; and they stepped aside together. Conrad then informed his Highness of everything which had happened in reference to the Countess of Morton,—how she had conveyed the despatches to Herman de Sarsfeldt—how she had become involved in such sore trouble—and how he (Conrad) had found in her a sister from whom he had for long years been separated, and of whom during that interval he had heard nothing. The Prince listened with interest; but still his countenance gave no promise of an immediately favourable result to Conrad's mission.

"In the first place," replied De Salza, "I must look into the official report of this matter which is doubtless contained amongst certain despatches that I ere now received from my trusty and well-beloved Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt, but over which documents I have not as yet had time to glance. Then, in the second place, I must learn more from a certain quarter than I already know in respect to the secret pursuits of your sister and the causes of her wanderings and errandries in masculine garb. Tarry you here, Conrad, and I will see whether it be immediately possible for me to attain this insight into your sister's antecedents."

Prince de Salza issued forth from the audience-hall, beckoning Fleming to accompany him; and they proceeded together to the suite of apartments occupied by Margaret. The Queen's toilet was just completed; and on learning that the Grand Master and her brother sought admission to her presence, she sped forward to receive them—for she thought that it was her bounden duty to display as much gratitude as possible towards the illustrious Prince to whom she lay under such immense obligations. Taking De Salza's hand, she pressed it with fervour, as she said in a low but impressive voice, "Sire, I know not wherefore you should have done so much for me—and equally impossible is it for me to conjecture by what means your Highness has accomplished it all! But most certain it is that my eternal gratitude is your Grace's due; and ever in my prayers shall the name of a Sovereign who is as generous as he is great, be linked with the names of those who are nearest and dearest unto me!"

"You shall presently know," responded Prince de Salza, also speaking in a low voice, "wherefore I

have taken so great an interest in you—although even if matters had in this sense been different, I should still have espoused your cause as that of right, and truth, and justice."

Margaret made a sign for all her ladies to retire with the exception of Albertina; and when the door had closed behind the retreating peeresses, the Queen threw herself into her brother's arms, murmuring, "Fleming—dear Fleming, are you proud of me now?"

"Yes, dearest sister," whispered the young Knight. "If you are happy, how can I be otherwise than rejoiced and proud in the possession of such a sister?"

Meanwhile Prince de Salza was exchanging friendly greetings with Albertina; and now, as he looked around, he said, "Ah! but our party is not complete; for I have a revelation to make—and there are others who by all the rights and claims of friendship are entitled to hear it."

Having thus spoken, Prince de Salza opened the door of the apartment; and beckoning to one of the Teutonic pages who were in waiting on the landing, he bade the youth hasten and request the Earls of Caithness and Bassentyne to repair thither. During the temporary absence of the page, Margaret took the opportunity to express her thanks to Prince de Salza for the costly gifts he had bestowed, at the same time adding an expression of her fear that she should never be enabled to testify the full sense of the obligation under which she lay towards him. The Prince smiled, and said with a peculiar look, "What if I had some reason—yes, some very special reason, Margaret, to be proud at thus beholding you decked with all the insignia of royalty?—aye, and proud too of seeing you set off the emblems themselves to the utmost advantage?"

The Queen, Albertina, and Fleming gazed in surprise and curiosity upon the Prince as he made this speech; for it seemed as if they were looking at a veil behind which they knew that some strange mystery must lie concealed, but the nature of which mystery they were utterly unable to conjecture; so that their anxiety was all the more intense for that veil to be drawn aside. Before however the Grand Master could give utterance to another syllable, the door was thrown open, and the page announced the Earl of Caithness.

Margaret hastened forward to throw herself into the arms of her benefactor—her more than father; and he wept over her with as much joy as if he had veritably been her parent in flesh and blood. And now, at this moment, all present—the Earl, Albertina, Fleming, and De Salza—recalled to mind with a singular simultaneousness the most remarkable passage in the note which Margaret had left upon the toilet-table of her chamber when she fled from Roslin Castle two days back:—"Let no one mistrust me! Not you, Albertina—nor your noble father—nor my high-minded brother—nor the generous-souled Sir Casimir D'Este! In two or three days all mystery will cease; and then, believe me, there will be wonder, and admiration, and joy!"

And these predictions were fulfilled—but little had Margaret foreseen how great a share the Teutonic Knight, the suspension of whose judgment she had besought along with the rest, was destined to have in the realization of all her views and the accomplishment of all her aims.

"Where is our young friend, the Earl of Bassentyne?" inquired the Grand Master.

The Earl of Caithness looked embarrassed for a moment, and then he said, "Roland is gone."

"Gone?" ejaculated Fleming Fitz-Allan: and it struck the Earl of Caithness that a similar ejacula-

tion came from the lips of Margaret—but he was not sure.

"Yes," his lordship hastened to say—for he was anxious to put an end to all suspense and uncertainty, in whatsoever quarters these feelings might exist—"Roland has taken his departure. But think not that this sudden withdrawal of the young nobleman has been occasioned by aught that need militate against the happiness of you, my dear Fleming—nor of you, my dearest child. On the contrary, he revealed to me your secret with the generous purpose that I should lose no time in joining hands where hearts, it appears, had already been linked by the tenderest bonds!"

The handsome countenance of Fleming Fitz-Allan and the lovely face of Albertina were both covered with blushes as they sank down together upon their knees at the feet of the Earl of Caithness. Fleming began to falter forth words of excuse for having dared to love the Earl's daughter without the permission of her sire; and Albertina, taking her father's hand, pressed it to her lips, at the same time moistening it with her tears. But the good nobleman hastened to cut short Fleming's apologetic speech by means of words of kindness uttered with much emotion; and bending down he kissed the spotless alabaster brow of his charming daughter. Then in a firmer voice, the Earl of Caithness bade them consider themselves to be betrothed; and he solemnly invoked a blessing on their head.

Prince de Salza and Margaret had been gazing on this scene with feelings of mingled pride and delight; but at the concluding phase thereof, the Grand Master turned towards the Queen, and with a smile on his lip and a certain sly significance in his look, he repeated these lines in an undertone:—

"Then brighter yet, O youth! shall be
The day-star of thy destiny;
And Roslin's virgin-rose for thee
Shall with thy laurels twine!"

Low as was the tone in which the Teutonic Prince repeated these mystic lines, they nevertheless caught the keen ear of Fleming Fitz-Allan. He at the moment had just pressed to his lips the hand of the beauteous Albertina; and as they both rose from their kneeling posture in the presence of the Earl of Caithness, Fleming stood riveted to the spot with astonishment.

"Good heaven! those lines!" he ejaculated, as Prince de Salza brought the quotation to an end. "How is it possible——"

"That I knew anything of the prophecy, my dear Fleming, which only required this crowning act of betrothal in order to give it a complete fulfilment?"—and De Salza spoke with a species of affectionate gaiety as he laid his hand upon the young Knight's shoulder. "That is the question you would ask me—is it not?"

"There is evidently some secret here!" interjected the Earl of Caithness, with a smile. "But this is a day for startling revelations!"

"At all events," interposed Margaret, with a flush upon the cheeks, "the secret in respect to the poem whereof his Highness has quoted a fragment, is entirely mine own; and *this* perhaps is not the most opportune moment to reveal it when we have so many other matters of importance to converse upon. For I am sure that we must all be dying with curiosity to learn how you, sire," addressing herself to Prince de Salza, "could have accomplished so many marvellous things in so short a space. And then, too, your Highness just now declared that you had a revelation to make——"

"Yes—it is so," said the Grand Master, his coun-

tenance now wearing an expression of mingled solemnity and emotion. "You know, my dear Fleming—and you likewise, Margaret—that your progenitor whose name has this day been mentioned in the audience-hall,—you know, I say, that your grandsire Sir John Logie left behind him three sons. The eldest, bearing the same Christian name, was your father. The second, whose name was Arthur, has for long years borne that of Benedictus; for the Abbot of Melrose——"

"Our uncle!" ejaculated Margaret and Fleming as if in the same breath.

"Yes—your uncle," responded Prince de Salza; "and right glad will the holy prelate be to fold you in his arms and acknowledge you to be his kinsfolk!"

"But our grandsire's third son?" ejaculated Margaret impatiently; while Fleming quivered, as well as herself, with a strong inward excitement—for they almost anticipated what would be the crowning solution of the mystery.

"Yes—your grandsire's *third* son," continued De Salza,—"*his* third son—Charles by name—an infant in the cradle at the time when, forty years ago, the unfortunate but guilty father perished on the scaffold—Oh! can you not guess—does no inward feeling tell you——"

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated both Margaret and Fleming, again as if speaking in the same breath: "you likewise are our kinsman!—you are our uncle!"

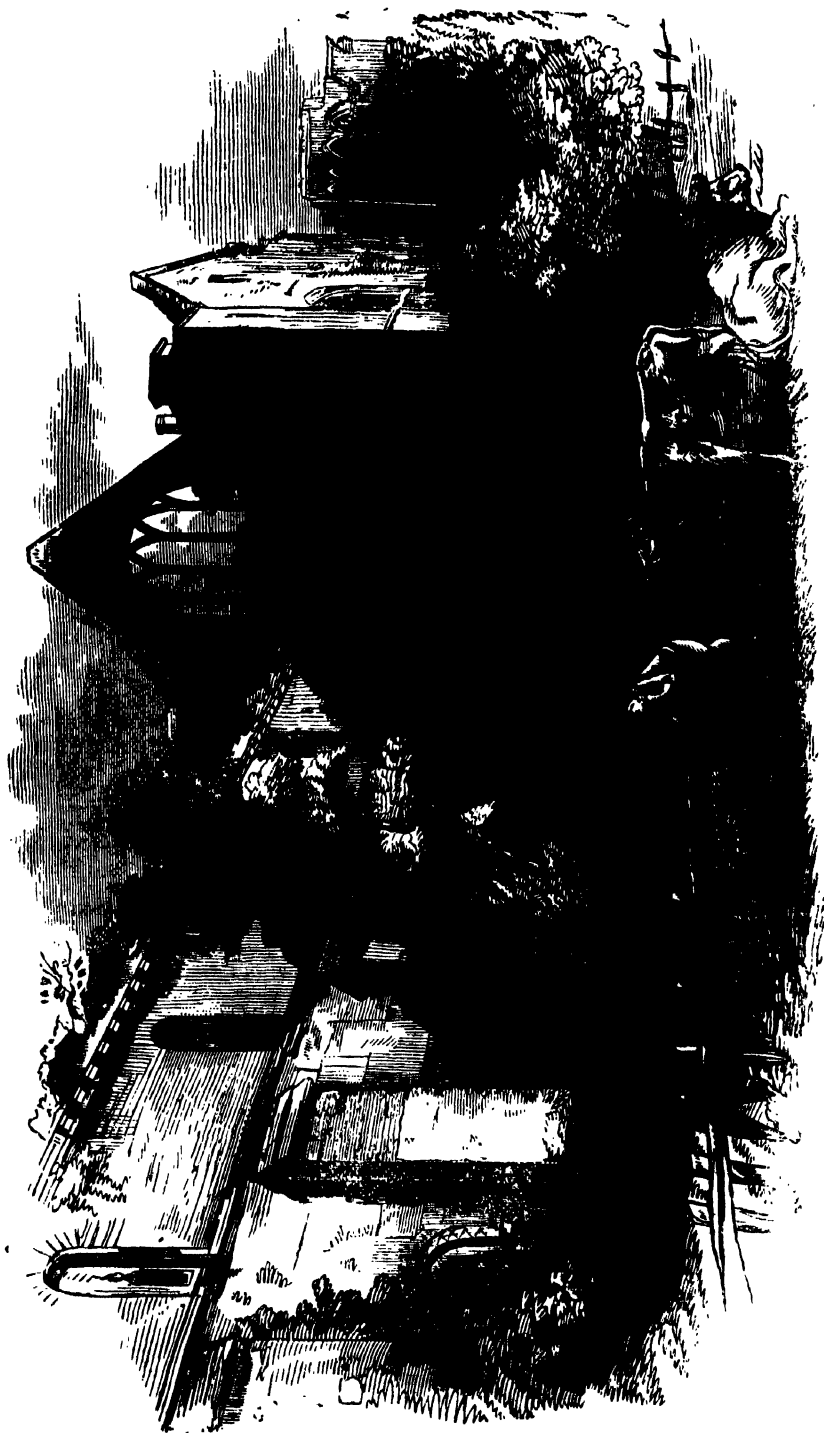
And then the nephew and niece were together folded in the arms of their princely relative; while the Earl of Caithness and his daughter gazed with ineffable emotions on the touching and interesting scene.

CHAPTER LXIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

Yes—very affecting was that scene when the nephew and niece were folded in the arms of the uncle; and the Earl of Caithness and his beauteous daughter stood by, much moved at the spectacle. A variety of explanations then ensued; and certain portions of these we must lay before our readers, in order to elucidate several points that may have appeared mysterious in former chapters of our narrative.

"When I resolved to bestow serious attention," said Prince de Salza, "on the demand privately made by the King of Scotland, to the effect that I would lend him the succour of some of my brave troops for the invasion of England, I naturally felt anxious to ascertain whether David was a monarch who deserved such assistance, and whether he would faithfully fulfil the conditions of any treaty into which he might enter with me. Thus, in the first instance, my attention was earnestly attracted towards Scotland in a political sense, while my heart yearned to revisit my native shores from which I had been absent ever since I was sixteen years of age! To be brief, I resolved to come, under the disguise of an assumed name, to Scotland. Providence itself must have ordained that while yet on my way thus to revisit my native clime, I should encounter you, dear nephew and niece!—but it was not until I found myself with my brother, the Abbot Benedictus of Melrose, that I learnt how near and dear unto me were ye two in whom I had already conceived a profound interest! And at that time it was my intention that ye should never learn that I was your kinsman; for I knew not, if such a secret were disclosed unto you, how far the avowal



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might lead to explanations painful and dangerous for all concerned. Therefore was it that I resolved to hold my peace, and yet to work for your benefit and to devise means for removing from your heads the ban which the unjust decrees of the Black Parliament had caused to affix itself upon you as the descendants of Sir John Logie. Thus, when under the guise of a humble envoy from the Teutonic Government, I negotiated with King David in Edinburgh in reference to the conditions on which an auxiliary force of Teutonic warriors was to be brought over to Scotland, I stipulated that the Scottish general who might be appointed to the command thereof, should have the privilege of asking some boon with the certainty of its being granted. I already intended, my dear Fleming, that you should be nominated to the command of the Teutonic auxiliaries; and I therefore prearranged matters with the idea that when the moment came for you to demand a boon, you would crave the revocation of the decrees of the Black Parliament in respect to the descendants of the house of Logie. But you—so generously anxious on behalf of your benefactor the Earl of Caithness, then a prisoner in the hands of the Black Douglas—had no thought for yourself; and thus that opportunity was lost. But I was resolved that the desirable result should sooner or later be brought about by some other means."

"Tell me, my princely uncle," said Fleming Fitz Allan, "wherefore was it that the worthy Abbot Benedictus wrote advising delays in reference to my claims to the estates bequeathed me, on the memorable day of the single combat, by the unfortunate Knight of Liddesdale?"

"Because your worthy uncle, the Abbot Benedictus," responded Prince de Salza, "knew of the stipulations which I was making with the King, and therefore hoped that my project would experience success, and that you, Fleming, would at the fitting time avail yourself of the opportunity to demand at David's hands the revocation of the edicts of the Black Parliament. But circumstances took a different turn—"

"On the occasion of your second visit to Roslin, my princely uncle," said Fleming,—"on which occasion you were just in time to rescue Albertina from the hands of Father Julius and the ruffian emissaries of the Douglas—"

"It was on that very same day," rejoined Prince de Salza, "that a despatch which had been sent from Edinburgh to Melrose, followed me to Roslin; and this despatch was from the King himself, to inform me that he accepted all the conditions which I had stipulated. Then was it, Fleming, that I gave you my ring, and bade you speed to Edinburgh to seek the King and demand your boon."

"Ah! now I recollect," ejaculated Fleming, "that on my return to Roslin, you questioned me closely upon the particulars of my interview with the King; and you looked and spoke mysteriously in reference to that very point—I mean the boon! Oh, if I had understood you at the time—if I had known that it was a kinsman, my dead father's brother, who was so kindly working on my behalf—"

"It is useless to retrospect regretfully, my dear Fleming," said Prince de Salza; "for the result at which I aimed, has been brought about, though by a different train of circumstances from that to which I sought to give a particular impulse."

"And now tell me, my dear uncle," said Margaret, "how was it that you made all those wonderful combinations which led to such grand issues and startling events to-day?"

"It may all have seemed to be wonderful

enough," replied Prince de Salza, with a smile; "but when I come to give you the explanations in detail, you will see that partly by the smiles of fortune—partly by accidental coincidences—and partly by the adoption of certain suitable precautions, the whole chain of incidents became connected, link by link, without disorder or confusion."

"And pray give us these explanations, dear kinsman," said the Queen; "for we are all curiosity to hear them."

"In the first place," said Prince de Salza, "I must recall to your mind, Margaret—and your's likewise, my dear Fleming—that in the midst of the exciting and painful scene which took place in the chapel at Dalkeith Castle the day before yesterday, I was summoned forth to speak to my faithful Jassent. Conceive my wonderment when he placed in my hands the marriage certificate, proving that you, dear Margaret, were a wedded wife and the Queen of Scotland! I instantaneously comprehended that the King was playing a treacherous part; and I resolved to baffle him. I might have produced the document in the oratory of Dalkeith, in order then and there to vindicate your character, and compel the King either to acknowledge you as his wife or state the grounds upon which he refused. But a second thought convinced me that it would be better to act with a more astute policy, and to collect all possible evidences in support of that certificate. Besides, I comprehended likewise that if you, Margaret, while yet unforgiven and unpardoned as a descendant of the house of Logie, had knelt with the King at the altar, the nuptials might only too certainly be pronounced null and invalid. Therefore I saw there was much to accomplish on your behalf; and I was resolved, if possible, to achieve it. How circumstances favoured my views and forwarded my designs, I will now explain."

There was a pause for a few moments; and then Prince de Salza continued in the following manner:—

"It seemed as if I was destined to receive, at the outset of the enterprise, the most material assistance from the very last person at whose hands such succour might have been anticipated—I mean the King himself. Needless were it now to tell how he sought to win me entirely over to his interests with reference to the grand events that were to occur this day at Dumbarton: but suffice it for me to explain that the result was to invest me with extraordinary and almost illimitable powers. Thus, from the Royal hands I received mandates enjoining all unto whom those documents should be presented, to show implicit obedience to the person or persons so presenting them. And now, my dear Margaret, you may comprehend how it was when you were last night introduced into Dumbarton Castle, you found everything ready for your reception. My emissaries prepared the way for this portion of the mysterious drama that was being enacted. Ah! I should add likewise that the King furnished me with blank documents bearing his autograph, and which I was authorized to fill up according to my own good will and pleasure. Hence the full pardon which his Majesty David of Scotland was made to vouchsafe unto all the descendants of the family of Logie, together with an equal degree of impunity to all who might at any time have befriended or harboured them contrary to the decrees of the Black Parliament. In plain terms, my dear Margaret, your royal husband overreached himself when he entrusted all those powers and authorities into my hands: but I rejoice that I should have used them as I have done—for has it not been to a good purpose?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the Prince's four listeners:

—and the Earl of Caithness added, “Your Highness must have been favoured by providence itself, expressly that by your agency all these good results should be brought about!”

“And now tell me, my dear uncle,” said Margaret, “how came the escort of Teutonic warriors in readiness in the grove near Dalkeith?”

“This, and other details at present mysterious enough, may quickly be explained,” responded Prince de Salza. “After I left Dalkeith in the afternoon of the day before yesterday, I despatched Jassent in search of Father Julius. I was then riding on by myself towards Edinburgh, when whom should I meet but Father Cyrus, with three or four other Cistercian monks of Melrose. They had been upon a visit to Edinburgh on some ecclesiastical business, and were going to pay their respects to the holy brotherhood of the monastery at Dalkeith. I at once saw that this meeting was most opportune. I had suspected, Margaret—nay, more, I had positively foreseen that some measures more or less stringent would be adopted to prevent you from leaving Dalkeith Castle for the purpose of coming hither to Dumbarton. It was therefore my intention, when I left Dalkeith, to send from Edinburgh some succour—but in this meeting with Father Cyrus I beheld an additional means which I could render available for your benefit. The worthy priest—though not suspecting I was the brother of Father Benedictus—yet believed me to be that worthy Abbot’s most intimate friend; and he therefore expressed every readiness to serve me. I just explained to him sufficient to enable him to understand how to act,—that he was to keep watch, and if he did not behold you go forth within a certain number of hours from Dalkeith Castle, he was to take it for granted that you were a prisoner, and was to adopt measures for your release. I assured him there should be a party of armed men in the grove near Dalkeith Castle soon after sunrise;—and we separated. I pushed on to Edinburgh, intending to hire for the nonce such partisans as I might need to carry out my views. But fortune was again favouring me. On arriving in the metropolis, I found that my faithful dependants Ernest de Zell and Conrad Rossel, together with several armed followers, had just arrived secretly in Edinburgh, bringing me the information that by that same time fifteen hundred of my brave Teutons, under Herman de Sarsfeldt, were ready for disembarkation on the western coast of Scotland. No tidings could be more agreeable; and now you may easily comprehend, my dear Margaret, how it was that a body of my own brave Teutons, under Ernest de Zell, was yesterday morning waiting in the grove near Dalkeith to be in readiness for any emergency or requirement, according as Father Cyrus should be able to ascertain in reference to yourself.”

“And, Ah! the delicate attention,” exclaimed Margaret, “of providing the two tirewomen and the changes of raiment!”

“For which arrangements the worthy hostess of the Golden Falcon in Edinburgh is to be specially thanked,” rejoined Prince de Salza, with a smile.

“As for those royal vestments which you now wear, Margaret,—I foresaw that the successful result of the entire enterprise would be the hailing of you as Queen; and in Edinburgh the veriest marvels can be accomplished when gold is lavished. My orders were given in the evening of the day before yesterday: and by the same hour last evening—that is to say, in four-and-twenty hours—robes, sceptre, crown, all were ready according to the promise of the clothiers and artificers!”

“But all this was marvellous!” exclaimed the young Queen; “and yet you, my princely uncle,

seem to speak as if the circumstances were simple enough!”

“Rest assured, Margaret,” replied De Salza solemnly, “I am not unmindful of the fact that the finger of heaven has evidently made itself apparent in much of all that has taken place. For instance, you have seen by the occurrences of this day how vitally important it was that Father Julius should be forthcoming. But yet, when Jassent received my mandate to seek the priest the day before yesterday, after we parted from you at Dalkeith, it seemed utterly uncertain whether the desired aim would be accomplished. All that Jassent knew was that Father Julius acted as chaplain at Tantallon Castle. Towards Tantallon therefore did Jassent purpose to speed,—when behold! in the midst of a wood, not a dozen miles distant from Dalkeith, did my faithful squire suddenly and most unexpectedly encounter the very object of his search. The priest had been hiding there for the last fortnight and upwards—indeed ever since the abortive scheme by which the Earl of Douglas endeavoured to gain possession of Roslin Castle. Overawed by threats at first, and then reassured by promises, Father Julius agreed to accompany Jassent to Edinburgh. He was brought into my presence at the Golden Falcon; and on the following day—that is to say, yesterday—I sent him, cloaked so as to be disguised, and in the custody of Jassent, to this fortalice.”

“I saw them dash past last evening,” interjected Margaret, “while on the way with my escort to Dumbarton. But there is yet one point concerning which explanation is needed—”

“Ah! I foresee to what your allusion will point,” exclaimed Prince de Salza: “it is in reference to Stephen Cochrane. There again providence favoured me in my designs; for the evening before last I encountered him in Edinburgh. He had just returned from a visit to England; and he had not as yet seen the King—who, I need not remind you, was at Dalkeith. I saw the immense advantage of having Stephen Cochrane’s testimony on our side: I therefore revealed myself to him, holding out on the one hand the most tempting promises, and on the other threatening all the weight of my vengeance if he dared oppose the cause in which I was interested. But I found him to be devoted to your interests, Margaret: and when I heard all the explanations which he had to give, and added them to those which I had just received from Father Julius, I found that you owed much, my niece, to the friendly offices of that man Cochrane on the memorable night that made you Scotland’s Queen. But we will not dwell on these points,” added De Salza hastily. “I think that you now comprehend how all my plans were taken and how my aims were succoured by a variety of incidental circumstances. Redman, I knew, was to accompany his noble master to Dumbarton; and therefore I saw that with the testimony of all who were parties to that mysterious wedding, your cause, dear Margaret, would be safe. Ah! I should add that I was careful to consult, though in the strictest secrecy, an eminent lawyer in Edinburgh; and it was by his advice I fulfilled all the forms in reference to the certificate:—otherwise, despite every other precaution, we might have been baffled through the gossiping vanity which displayed itself ere now on the part of Sir Richard Mildmay.”

“Once more, dearest uncle,” said Margaret, “accept my fervid, most heartfelt thanks—”

“Enough, my dear niece!” interjected the Grand Master of the Teutons: “I know that you are grateful. But our conversation has already lasted full long; and remember that the King is adopting

a conciliatory policy towards you, so that he must be met in a corresponding spirit. You must therefore now seek him. But first I would fain learn something relative to all the proceedings of that false Sir Louis Carlyon—or Countess of Morton, as it now appears that she proves to be."

"What?" exclaimed the Earl of Caithness, staggering at the announcement which came upon him like a thunderbolt: "Sir Louis Carlyon a woman!—he wife of my own kinsman! Can it be so?"

Ejaculations of astonishment had also burst from the lips of Fleming and Albertina; and Prince de Salza hastened to explain the predicament in which Lady Morton was placed with his Teutonic Knights in the Vale of Leven.

"Indeed," he added, "her brother—a worthy adherent of mine, whom I never knew until this day by any other name than that of Conrad Rossel—is now waiting anxiously for some decisive resolve in respect to his sister."

It was now Margaret's turn to take up the narrative; and she detailed all the particulars of the Countess of Morton's conduct towards herself—not forgetting the insult in reference to the crowned skull placed on the velvet cushion, with the tapers burning on either side.

"All this is verily most serious," said Prince de Salza; "and it becomes a case in which I shall not choose to interfere."

"And I," exclaimed the Earl of Caithness, "am full of indignation at the idea that the wife of a kinsman of mine should have so vilely and treacherously deported herself!"

At this moment a knock was heard at the outer door of the apartment. Fleming Fitz-Allan hastened to see who was there; and he found one of the principal nobles attached to the King's person.

"His Majesty," said the nobleman, "has sent me to intimate that he will either come hither to pay his devoirs to her Grace the Queen; or he will await the presence of her Highness in the State-apartment—which perhaps would prove a more suitable place for the meeting of such illustrious personages."

Margaret—who overheard what was thus said at the threshold—flung a look upon Prince de Salza, as if to inquire what course she should adopt; and his Highness hastily but emphatically whispered in her ear, "Be docile and submissive as a wife, in all things where your honour as a woman and your dignity as a Queen are neither shocked nor compromised!"

It was with a look of gratitude that Margaret acknowledged this advice; and at once taking her cue therefrom, she said, loud enough to be heard by the nobleman at the threshold, "Be so kind, brother, as to desire his lordship to express unto his august Majesty my immediate willingness to proceed to the State-apartment, where my royal husband has signified his gracious readiness to receive me."

A few minutes afterwards Prince de Salza rejoined Conrad Rossel in the audience-hall; and having communicated to the astonished and disgusted brother the entire history of a sister's foul treacheries and iniquities, the Prince added, "It grieves me, my faithful adherent, to be unable to pronounce an immediate merciful decision on this point; but so grave and alike so delicate are all its involvements, that I must perforce leave it to the discretion of her who has the best right to decide—I mean her Majesty Queen Margaret."

Then was it that Conrad Rossel sped back to the grove in the valley of the Leven, and held with his sister that painful interview which resulted in the self-abasement of the Countess of Morton's pride

to such a degree as to indite a humble petition to the Queen.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE KING AND QUEEN.

THE State-apartment was large and lofty; and it was well furnished, because Dumbarton was a royal castle, and therefore arrangements were always made to accommodate the Sovereign in case of a visit on the part of Majesty taking place to the fortalices. King David had retired to his own room after having witnessed the marriage of the Earl of Douglas and the Lady Elvira, and had made a change in his toilet. Richly as he was before apparelled, he now arrayed himself in his most splendid Court costume, and which was in degree but second only to his coronation robes. Let the reader remember that he was playing the part of an astute politician and doing a certain homage to the high dignitaries of the State, by affecting to bow to their decision in respect to the claims of Margaret to be his bride and Queen. It was therefore perfectly consistent with such policy that he should now prepare to meet Margaret with all the honour and consideration due to her rank and position; and brief though the interval for preparation was, yet David with his usual tact had done everything well.

Let us look into the interior of the State-apartment at Dumbarton Castle. At one extremity stood the King, attended by a number of his most devoted nobles, who, as well as their royal master, were apparelled in sumptuous style. Along one side of the room a number of the King's guards were drawn up; and along the other side there was an array of the Teutonic warriors, marshalled under the command of Ernest de Zell. King David considered it to be an admirable stroke of policy thus to display a sample of his Teutonic auxiliaries in that room and on that occasion; for now that he was endeavouring to make the best of matters which had turned out badly for his own cause, he deemed it expedient to commence the most conciliatory policy towards Prince de Salza. Besides, he had already seen and heard enough to convince him that the presence of a Teutonic force, so far from being galling to the great nobles who surrounded him, or to his own body-guards, was welcome and agreeable,—for the twofold reason that the fact seemed to promise an invasion of England, for which every true Scottish heart then yearned; and in the second place because nearly all the Teutonic warriors who had as yet arrived upon the Scottish soil, were of Celtic, Saxon, or Milesian origin.

And now the great folding-doors were thrown open at the extremity of the apartment facing the end where the King stood; and Queen Margaret made her appearance, attended by the noble ladies who had been already appointed to wait upon her, and by several peers and knights of distinction. Her train was borne by one of those ladies: she wore the diadem upon her brow, and carried the sceptre in her hand. The Earl of Caithness and Fleming Fitz-Allan were amongst the male companions of her Majesty: Prince de Salza was not present. He had gone, as we have seen, to communicate with Conrad Rossel; and moreover, even if his attention were not thus required elsewhere, he would have remained absent all the same, for fear lest his presence might seem to savour of a purpose either to overawe the King or to triumph

in respect to the cause which he had so particularly espoused.

Margaret was completely dignified and self-possessed; but all her queenly honours seemed to sit upon her as naturally as if she had long borne them, and as if she had been reared as a princess from her cradle. She advanced slowly towards the centre of the room: then she stopped and made a graceful curtsy to her royal husband. David now descended from the dais, on which were placed two thrones of equal height and perfectly resembling each other. He advanced towards Margaret with that demeanour of courtly dignity and grace which he knew so well how to assume, and without the slightest appearance of embarrassment arising from the part which he had enacted towards her whom he was now compelled to greet as a bride. Indeed, a stranger unacquainted with all that had occurred, would have imagined that the nuptials might have been celebrated only that very day, and that the King was now stepping forward to greet a bride whom he loved, and whom he was proud to raise up as the sharer of his throne. Margaret with a glance comprehended precisely the part which his Majesty was enacting so studiously and yet with an air of such perfect ease and self-possession; and she instantaneously threw into her looks a certain amiable bashfulness, the modest confusion of a bride deteriorating naught from the dignity of a Queen.

Taking her hand, and raising it with all the courtesy of a polished cavalier to his lips, the King said, "Welcome, my beautiful Queen!—and believe me, this is one of the happiest moments of my life."

"I ask your Grace to believe me in my turn," responded Margaret, "when I assure you that *this* is the happiest moment in my life."

The King again bowed; and still retaining Margaret's hand, he conducted her to the dais, where she took her place upon one of the throne-like seats, while he proceeded to occupy the other. He then glided at once into a conversation on general topics, and discoursed with as much ease, affability, and gaiety as if nothing in connexion with the day's proceedings had in any way tended to disturb the equanimity of his mind. Margaret adapted herself to the same humour; and if we may again suppose the presence of an uninitiated stranger, we may remark that such an individual would have conceived that the waters which had wafted the hymeneal bark wherein the fortunes of the royal pair were now ventured, had ever been characterized by the serenest and tranquildest flow.

Thus conversed David and Margaret for upwards of a quarter of an hour; and then the King made a sign which was comprehended by all those who were in attendance. The guards and the Teutonic warriors defiled out of the apartment: then all the ladies formed a procession and passed thence,—the peers and knights following with corresponding regularity and order. The King and Margaret were now alone together.

"It seems, my sweet bride," said his Majesty, "that for the last day or two a species of warfare has raged between us. It is now for us to determine whether this state of hostility is to continue, or whether we are to make terms of peace."

The King spoke with a sort of affable indifference and easy carelessness; and Margaret said, with a smile which was just sufficiently triumphant to show that she felt the security of her own position, but yet on the other hand sufficiently winning and submissive to call into play the fascinations of a woman and to denote her willingness to accept the duties of a wife,—"It is for you, my royal husband, to dictate; and in all things honourable as well as

seemly, you will find that I shall be full willing to obey."

"Might I ask," said the King, "wherefore you thought it expedient to quit the Castle of Dalketh in so sudden and stealthy a manner, since I, your husband, had appointed that place as your temporary home?"

"It was understood that I should be here present this day," replied Margaret, respectfully but firmly: "and finding myself in prisonage, I escaped. Your Majesty best knows whether you gave me, your young wife, a suitable companion in the Countess of Morton."

"Understand me well, Margaret," said the King, becoming a trifle more grave in his look and speech, "that if I had chosen, I might have adopted stringent measures to prevent your appearance in the audience-hall this day. For in the middle of the night, immediately on my arrival, I was advertised of your flight from Dalketh—"

"Doubtless by one of the Countess of Morton's followers?" interjected Margaret; "for I have recently learnt that her two men-at-arms, with one of her females in the disguise of a page, reached Dumbarton Castle at about the period to which your Majesty alludes."

"Yes," rejoined the King: "I have no hesitation in admitting that it was thus I learnt the circumstance of your escape from that home which I, as your husband, thought fit to assign unto you."

"And which home," returned Margaret, "it would have been beneath my sense of propriety and dignity to accept for a moment longer than I had already occupied it. But with regard to your Grace's assertion that my appearance in the audience-hall might have been prevented, I beg to hold a different opinion."

The King bit his lip for a moment; and then said, "I am to understand therefore, Margaret, that you were very confident in the great power and authority which you had for the advancement of your own peculiar interests?"

"I confess, sire, that I had every hope in the success of a good cause; but I knew not how all the circumstances which we witnessed, would develop themselves. I was borne along as if upon the waters of an unknown current."

"Prince de Salza must have had most potent reasons," said the King, "for espousing your cause with such zeal and fervour."

Margaret felt that the fact of her near kinship with the Grand Master of the Teutons constituted a secret which was not her own, and that it was natural for one who was now a Sovereign-Prince to conceal the fact that he was descended from a race which had been branded in Scotland. She therefore said, "Prince de Salza was bound alike by his knightly vows as well as by an inherent love of justice and of truth, to become the champion of the cause of an otherwise defenceless woman. But it seems to me, sire," she continued, "that the strain which the discourse is taking, is a prolongation of the hostilities of the morning, rather than an advance towards a better understanding."

"I do not wish to be at war with you, Margaret," replied the King. "You know that you have triumphed—"

"Would to God," she exclaimed, in an impassioned tone, "that you had never given me cause to assume what I see you regard as having been a hostile attitude towards your Grace!"

"Well, Margaret," rejoined David, "there are one or two little matters for us to settle; and then we will be as good friends as you can wish."

"And what are these little matters, sire," asked

the Queen, with an air of some surprise, "that are to be settled between us?"

"Let us first of all speak of your brother," said David. "His surname is now declared to be Logie. I do not think it is one which he will be very anxious to bear, notwithstanding the decree of pardon and the repeal of the penal edicts which have this day been promulgated."

"He himself, sire, feels that the name which you have mentioned," responded Margaret, "is so little to be estimated by the loyal Scottish people, that he purposes to retain the name of Fitz-Allan, which he has borne from his infancy."

"That at least," said the King, "is a concession to all decencies and proprieties of feeling. But the brother of a Queen ought to bear a higher title than that of a Knight. Have you not reflected that it is for me to confer the loftier distinction of Lord of Liddesdale, so that in the bearing of this proud name all questions will be absorbed touching and concerning the fact whether he be a Fitz-Allan or a Logie?"

This was the very boon which Margaret, if in a condition to ask one, would have demanded; and great though her self-possession was, yet she could not prevent a glittering of joy from appearing in her eyes.

"Well," continued the King, "I see that the proposal goes with your inclinations. But Ah!" he added, as if quite carelessly, "have you heard of the predicament in which that unfortunate Countess of Morton is involved with the Teutonic warriors yonder? A rumour thereof just now reached my ears——"

"Yes, sire," answered the Queen; "I am acquainted with every particular in connexion with that circumstance; and I cannot help thinking that heaven itself has placed the Countess of Morton in a position which may bring down upon her head condign punishment for her manifold offences."

"Then perhaps Prince de Salza," said the King, "has already resolved upon inflicting such punishment as that whereunto you allude?"

Margaret made no answer; and the King, after vainly waiting upwards of a minute for one, said, "I have no doubt, Margaret, that the Prince has left the matter entirely in your hands. At all events he will be guided by your implacability on the one hand, or by your intercession on the other. What say you?"

Margaret felt that she was bound to give a straightforward answer; for she would not condescend to evasion or subterfuge; and she therefore replied, "Yes, sire—you are right. Prince de Salza will be guided by my sentiments in the matter to which you allude."

"Then let there be a bargain between us?" exclaimed the King. "The title of Baron of Liddesdale for your brother on the one hand—and the freedom of the Countess of Morton on the other!"

Margaret hesitated for a moment; and then she answered, "But this, sire, is to permit one who well merits punishment at my hands, to go unpunished. No! it cannot be! Yet the present is assuredly the occasion for showing mercy. Let the Countess of Morton demonstrate her contrition—and she shall be forgiven."

"She will never do it, Margaret!" cried the King. "That woman has the pride of Lucifer!"

"And I, sire," was the dignified response, "have the pride of an injured woman and of an outraged Queen."

"Am I to understand that you expect the Countess of Morton to write a penitential letter or send a humble memorial?" asked the King, with a slight sneer.

"Doubtless! this must be her punishment—and upon no other terms," added Margaret emphatically, "will I consent to intercede with the Prince de Salza on her behalf."

"Decide upon nothing hastily," said the King. "Two hours are to elapse ere we sit down to the grand banquet which is in preparation. Let your favourable decision be signified to me within a few minutes of the sounding of the trumpets for the festival—and your brother shall take his place at the board amongst the peers of Scotland as Baron of Liddesdale! If, on the other hand, you speak not favourably when we meet two hours hence, I swear by my crown and sceptre that no title shall ever be bestowed by me upon that brother of your's with the traitorous surname!"

Having thus spoken, the King rose from his seat, and rang a silver bell that was at hand. The folding doors again flew open; and from the ante-room the peers, the knights, and the ladies again poured in procession into the State-apartment. David made a most courteous bow to his Queen,—who, taking her place at the head of her own suite, passed out of the room in one direction, while the King quitted it by another set of doors opening behind the throne.

Nearly two hours elapsed: it only wanted about ten minutes to the moment when the clarions were expected to sound in proclamation of the festival being in readiness; and Margaret, attended by her ladies and some gentlemen in waiting, proceeded to the State-apartment, where, according to ceremony, she was to be joined by the King ere adjourning to the banqueting-room. She had not altered her decision: she was resolved to abide by it; and in this she was supported by the counsel of the Prince de Salza, who had fully agreed with her idea that it would be too great a concession to the King to allow the vile agent of his treacheries to escape without even the slightest humiliation as a punishment.

Scarcely had Margaret entered the State-apartment, when a page made his appearance; and bowing low, he presented a sealed packet on a silver salver. It was addressed to the Queen with all the usual forms and flourishes of epithets and distinctions. Margaret opened it:—it was a petition from the Countess of Morton, penned in the humblest, most contrite, most grovelling strain, and imploring mercy. A flush of triumph passed over the Queen's superbly handsome countenance; and at the same instant the folding-doors behind the dais were thrown open, and the Lord Chamberlain announced in a loud tone, "The King!"

Margaret advanced to meet him—he likewise approached her; and they met in the midst of the spacious apartment,—the lords and ladies, the knights and other attendants, keeping at a respectful distance, so that whatever discourse might pass between the royal pair should not be overheard.

"Allow me to inquire," said the King, assuming an off-hand careless demeanour, as if the matter were after all an object of more or less indifference to him, "whether you have arrived at a favourable decision in respect to the Countess of Morton?"

"Yes, sire," responded the Queen, with the most perfect calmness. "The Countess of Morton is pardoned."

"Ah!" said the King, scarcely able to conceal his satisfaction, for the decision was really most unexpected, considering all he knew of Margaret's temper; "I thought this was an occasion alike for mercies and bounties. Here, then, is the royal decree conferring the promised dignity upon your brother."

Thus speaking, he placed in Margaret's hand the

patent of nobility for Fleming; and she acknowledged the proceeding with a most affable smile.

"In return for this boon," she said, "I cannot do otherwise than consign to your Grace's keeping the document which has induced me to show mercy unto the Countess of Morton."

She took the petition from beneath the folds of her garments as she thus spoke, and presented it to the King. He glanced on her inquiringly for a moment: then opening the packet, he rapidly ran his eye over its contents. For an instant he became pale, and bit his lips with vexation at the idea that his wife should triumph in everything which she undertook and which either directly or indirectly could at all tend to humiliate himself; and then suddenly assuming an air of easy courteous gaiety, he said, "Now you are satisfied! But if you were any other than the Queen, I should warn you that it is a dangerous thing to provoke the ire of such a being as the Countess of Morton."

CHAPTER LXV.

QUEEN MARGARET AND LORD LIDDESDALE.

MARGARET was about to give a pointed answer to the King, and prove to him how little she recked for his implied threat of vengeance on the part of the Countess of Morton, when it struck her that if she wished to carry out a conciliatory policy, she must be somewhat tolerant and forbearing. She therefore seemed not to take any notice of the remark made by her royal husband, and which we duly recorded at the close of the preceding chapter.

And now the guests who had been invited to the banquet, were fast gathering in the State-apartment. His Highness Prince de Salza, attended by Fleming Fitz-Allan, Ernest de Zell, and some half-dozen of the other principal officers of the Teutonic forces, made his appearance. He was sumptuously dressed; for though in times of need and in hours of danger the Grand Master was capable of bearing his part as one of the mightiest warriors of Christendom, yet in the hours of recreation and festivity he could prove himself the courtly cavalier, and show himself worthy of his sovereign rank according to the high estimate in which Royalty was held in those times. The Earl of Caithness likewise entered the State-apartment, with the beautiful Albertina leaning upon his arm; and next to the Queen of Scotland, the Earl's daughter was assuredly the object of the greatest interest amongst the exquisite galaxy of female attractions.

The King and Prince de Salza had not met until now, since the scenes in the audience-hall: but, as we have already stated, it was David's policy to conciliate the Grand Master of Teutonic Knights. Now, be it understood that though De Salza was only addressed by the denomination of Prince, yet that he was reckoned amongst the Monarchs of the world—he bore the distinction of an independent Sovereign—and he wielded a power second to no potentate in Europe; for under his auspices the Teutonic dominion had reached its culminating point. He therefore stood on an equal footing with King David; and it may not prove uninteresting to our readers to learn how the etiquette of that period regulated the meeting of two great Sovereigns beneath a roof where one was now actually the guest of the other.

Let it be understood that the King of Scotland, with Margaret leaning on his arm, had gracefully lounged, so to speak, towards that extremity where stood the dais with the two thrones: while Prince

de Salza, attended by his suite, had entered the spacious room by the folding-doors at the opposite extremity. A page standing at these folding doors, announced in a loud voice—"His Sovereign Highness the excellent and mighty Prince de Salza!"

Then the Lord Chamberlain attached to the Scottish Court, advanced hastily, but still with becoming dignity, to the centre of the apartment; and taking his post a little on one side, he suffered the end of his rod, or wand of office, to rest upon the floor three or four paces in front of him. The point which the rod thus marked, was supposed to be the centre of the room; and so it was as accurately as could be estimated. The King, with Margaret still leaning upon his arm, advanced from one extremity towards that point,—while from the other extremity Prince de Salza likewise advanced, each potentate respectively measuring his steps in such a way that neither should reach the centre of the room before or after the other. When the middle point was attained, and the two potentates stood face to face with about the interval of a yard between them, they both extended their hands—or rather, we should say, each his right hand at the same instant; and the clasp of friendship was exchanged.

"Sire and brother," said the King of Scotland, "you are welcome in this our royal fortress."

"Sire and brother," answered the Grand Master, "with pleasure do I accept your royal hospitality."

"Allow me," said King David, "to present to your Highness my well-beloved Queen, who shares with me the pleasure of entertaining a warrior-monarch whose presence sheds lustre upon the scene."

"I offer the congratulations of a potentate and the homage of a knight," rejoined the Prince, "to the gracious Queen Margaret. Permit me to present to your Majesty my young friend Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan, who, though a duteous subject of your Highness, nevertheless holds a distinguished post under my orders."

"I greet Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan," said the King, who, true to his present system of policy, bestowed a gracious smile upon our young hero.

"Methinks," said Margaret, with a flush of pride and pleasure upon her gloriously handsome countenance, "that, thanks to your Majesty's gracious favour, I have it in my power to say unto my beloved brother that this is the last time he need be spoken of or addressed as Sir Fleming Fitz-Allan. It is therefore eminently gratifying to me that I claim the privilege of being the first to address him as Baron of Liddesdale."

Thus speaking, Margaret presented to her brother the patent of nobility; and as our hero took it, he pressed the hand of his sister in grateful acknowledgment of the proud distinction thus conferred upon him. While he was receiving the congratulations of his friends upon the occasion, the clarius outside in the court-yard proclaimed that the festival was in readiness; and the whole company proceeded to the banqueting-room, the King and Margaret leading the way.

It is not our purpose to dwell at any length upon the festival which now took place: suffice it to say that it was of the most splendid description, and that every countenance seemed animated with joy—for all the principal personages present had some special reasons for self-gratulation on the result of the proceedings of the day—with the exception perhaps of the King; but he was prepared to adopt a policy which gave him the appearance of being as blithe and contented as the rest. According to the custom which prevailed in those times as well as at the present day, the female portion of the company

withdrew before the members of the other sex quitted the banquet-table; and Margaret retired for a while to her own apartments. The young Lord Liddesdale, however, soon stole away from the festive hall, and sought his royal sister's rooms; for he most anxiously longed to have an explanation with Margaret upon a certain subject concerning which he had not hitherto found an instant's leisure to speak to her alone. Besides, he knew that in his sister's apartment he should find Albertina; and far more agreeable to the young lover were the smiles of the beautiful maiden than the nectar poured out into the bacchanalian goblet.

Margaret was conversing with Albertina and her attendant ladies when Fleming entered. She suspected that her brother wished to receive a certain explanation—she had no reason for deferring it—and she therefore made a sign to intimate that she wished to be left with Lord Liddesdale. Albertina and the ladies withdrew into an adjoining room:—the brother and sister were now therefore alone together.

"Let me come at once to the point, my dear brother," said Margaret, "which I know that you are anxious to touch upon. Come, sit down by my side; for now we can converse without restraint. But tell me first of all, are you not pleased—are you not gratified at the position which we have both attained? Do you regret, either for your sake or mine, that any of the means which have respectively raised us to these lofty elevations, should have been adopted?"

"No, dearest sister," returned Fleming; "there is nothing that I can regret. In a word, we find ourselves in positions which but a few months back we could not have dared, even in the wildest flights of imagination, to hope to attain! We should not even have dreamt of them! Nor did we. Our names purged from hereditary infamy—you, my sweet sister, raised to the highest rank to which any lady could possibly aspire—I rich and ennobled, and blest in the heart's sincerest affections—Oh! what more could we wish for? Or may I not again ask, have we not gained ten thousand times more than ought to which our most presumptuous and ambitious dreamings could have ever soared? One thing only disquiets me—"

"I know what you mean, Fleming," interjected Margaret quickly; "but fear not! The King has fought a hard battle—but he is vanquished—he feels it and knows it—and there is an agreement between us that the past is to be forgotten and that we are friends."

"Then I have not another care!" said Fleming, fervidly embracing his sister. "But now for the promised explanation! You know what I mean, dear Margaret? Already has my fancy been disenchanted of its superstitious belief!—already have I perceived that something which for a while I could not look upon otherwise than as preternatural, admits of a natural interpretation! Tell me, therefore, at once—were not you," asked Fleming, with a smile, "the mysterious spirit who on that memorable occasion in the vaults appeared to me amidst a halo of light—a spirit clothed in white and with a veil thrown over the head? Ah! I see that it was so!—and no wonder, dear sister, that the veil was so closely folded as to prevent the countenance from being discerned!"

"Did I prove an evil spirit to you on that occasion, dear Fleming?" inquired his sister, with a fond bewitching smile.

"Oh no! assuredly not!" exclaimed the young Lord Liddesdale; "for to confess the truth, that mystic chant afterwards dwelt in my brain and vibrated in my ears on many occasions when such

influence was most useful and effective—nerving my arm in the fight at Hermitage Castle—"

"And inspiring you with confidence, dear Fleming," interjected Margaret, "when the image of the lovely Albertina floated before you, or when you found yourself in her society?"

"Yes," exclaimed our hero enthusiastically.

"But how, in the name of everything marvellous, my dear Margaret, did you accomplish that strange proceeding?—how did you give such a vision-like appearance to the whole ceremony that I scarcely dared doubt or suspect the preternatural truth?"

"You remember, Fleming," replied Margaret, "the discourse which took place between you and me in reference to the heritage of the estates of Liddesdale? You hesitated and you wavered—you had compunctions and fears—in short, I saw that some influence higher than my own was needed to make you grasp the prize that was within your reach. I was determined to adopt some course to strengthen your steps in the pathway which should lead to fortune. An accident proved suggestive at that instant. Redman confidentially informed me that it was your purpose to visit at night-time the tomb of our father—"

"Ah, then, Redman was in the secret?" ejaculated Fleming. "But I am foolish to ask the question! He must have been!—or else how could you possibly have so well combined your proceedings?"

"Yes—Redman was in the secret," rejoined Margaret. "Do you not remember that after you heard the soft voice murmuring the word *Amen*—"

"I bade Redman leave me—I took the torch from his hand," continued Fleming,—“and alone did I proceed to the third compartment to kneel by the tomb of our father!”

"But Redman followed you noiselessly at a distance," said Margaret, with a smile; "and it was his hand that dashed the torch from the place where you had left it."

"Ah!—and now I bethink me," said Lord Liddesdale, "it struck me that as I knelt by the side of our father's tomb I heard the sound of a footstep approaching from somewhere behind."

"It was Redman," said Margaret, "who had received his instructions from me, and who extinguished the torch in order that the means of diffusing a mystic light which I had with much trouble and difficulty contrived at the extremity of the vault, should have the opportunity of a gradual and effective development."

"And those means of light?" asked Fleming.

"Lamps already burning, but shut up in two boxes," answered the Queen; "and the lids of these boxes so arranged as to open gradually by means of strings which Redman himself held and pulled judiciously in the spot where he concealed himself. Ah! I confess that every moment I fancied and feared you would rush forward to ascertain whether it were really a vision, or only a delusion to be accounted for by natural means. But no!—you gazed—you remained riveted to the spot—while in a disguised tone I gave forth the mystic chant which I had composed for the purpose."

"Oh, that chant which has proved to be so prophetic!" exclaimed Fleming, with an expression of wonder upon his countenance as he rapidly flung a mental glance over the details of the three lyrical stanzas.

"After all, my dear brother," responded Margaret, with a smile, "there has been nothing so very, very wonderful in the fulfilment of the predictions; for I foresaw that everything depended upon yourself—it was under this impression that I composed the chant—and it was to accomplish a desirable aim



that I took so much trouble in combining all my arrangements for the occasion."

"But the sudden appearance of Prince de Salza?" ejaculated Fleming,—"he whom at that time we knew only as Sir Casimir D'Este?"

"His sudden appearance," replied Margaret, "astonished and for a moment confounded me as much as it could have surprised yourself."

"But what followed," remarked Fleming, "was all the work of an instant. You approached the form of Sir Casimir—or rather, I should say, of Prince de Salza—you laid your hand upon his arm—and then the entire scene vanished from my view, and utter darkness prevailed!"

"My worthy coadjutor Redman," replied Margaret, with another smile of sweet archness, "saw that it was indeed high time to plunge that scene into utter darkness—which, as you may comprehend, was very easily effected by his suddenly pulling the strings that closed the lids of the boxes containing the lamps. For Redman was as much surprised and alarmed as I myself was at the abrupt appearance of the Teutonic warrior. But you said, Fleming, that you beheld me place my hand upon the warrior's arm:—and such was the fact. I saw that he himself stood for an instant amazed at the scene which so unexpectedly burst upon him as he entered the vault; and thus was it that no ejaculation escaped his lips. I instantaneously said to him in a low quick whisper, '*Be silent! I am Margaret! You shall know everything presently!*' And my adjuration was not made in vain; for the warrior generously held his peace and remained utterly silent until we knew by the closing and the locking of the barrier-gates that you, my dear Fleming, were leaving the vaults and retracing your steps to the oratory to which Redman had silently and cautiously made his way before you."

"And then the Teutonic warrior sought explanations from your lips?" said Fleming inquiringly; "and he doubtless gave you some in return?"

"The explanations which he had to give," rejoined Margaret, "were speedily afforded—though I did not then comprehend them to their fullest extent. It was not until to-day, when a few hours ago in this very apartment he revealed himself as our kinsman, that my recollection flashed back to the memorable night on which he visited that place of tombs—"

"I understand you, Margaret," said Fleming. "He doubtless told you on that occasion, that it was through mere curiosity he descended at night-time into the place of tombs?"

"Yes—it was thus he spoke," rejoined Margaret; "and he said that he had proposed to visit the vaults thus stealthily because he knew that the Earl of Caithness experienced a reluctance to introduce strangers to the place where his ancestors lay unclothed in their martial panoplies, the strange yet awful memorials and evidences of a legend which reflected but little honour on the house of Roslin! I need not remind you, my dear Fleming, that whereas Lieutenant Redman kept the keys of the door communicating from the oratory with the vaults, the steward Hepburn on the other hand was the custodian of the keys belonging to the folding-doors at the other extremity of the place of tombs—"

"That very extremity," interjected Fleming, with a smile, "where you appeared to me, dear sister, as the spirit of the Lady Blanche!"

"Yes," responded Margaret,—"that same extremity of the sepulchral subterranean. But I was about to inform you that the Teutonic warrior had privately obtained the keys from Hepburn, and he had descended to the vaults, little anticipating the scene which was to burst upon his vision."

"And now we understand, Margaret," observed Lord Liddesdale, solemnly, "that it was not a sentiment of mere curiosity which led the Teutonic chief down into that place of the dead: but it was an affectionate longing to kneel and pray by the tomb of his perished brother! But what said he when you confessed to him—as you must have done—the motive for which you had devised the vision-like scene and composed the chant?"

"He promised to keep my secret—although he hesitated not to express his strong disapproval of all such means of exercising an influence over the human mind. He made me repeat the chant to him: I dared not refuse—I knew not at the moment whether he might not have previously listened at the door and heard it: but subsequently, when I reviewed the proceedings, I certainly marvelled that the Teutonic Knight did not question me in reference to the meaning of the line which spoke of the *heritage of shame*. But, as he said naught on the subject, I concluded that he had not been particularly struck thereby. Yet the very circumstance which thus troubled me somewhat at the time, had its effect and its significance after all."

"Explain yourself, dear Margaret," said Fleming.

"Follow me well, brother, in what I am about to say," continued the Queen. "When the Teutonic chief was in discourse with his elder brother, the Abbot of Melrose, upon all family matters past and present, those two uncles of ours were necessarily in a state of uncertainty whether we ourselves knew the secret of our birth. They fancied that we must have been initiated in it, and yet they had no certainty on the point. It was nevertheless important for our princely uncle to know, inasmuch as he had resolved to take our interests into his best consideration. Well then, Fleming, his uncertainty on that particular point was cleared up when I repeated to him the chant: for that line whereunto I have already alluded, showed him that the secret of our birth was indeed known unto us both. This afternoon I had a second interview with our uncle, and an hour's discourse alone with him, just before we all proceeded to the State-apartment ere adjourning to the banqueting room. We conversed together upon many things—we compared notes, and gave little details of explanation to fill up those gaps which occurred in the reading of the past. It was then that our uncle informed me how he was indebted to the circumstance of the chant being repeated to him, about two months back, for the clearing-up of his previously existing uncertainty as to whether you and I were acquainted with the secret of our birth."

"Oh, how interesting are all these explanations?" said Fleming. "But at this moment the name of Redman occurs to my recollection, and I am reminded that he was one of the witnesses of your marriage with the King."

"Yes," replied Margaret. "Redman had ever experienced the deepest interest in me—indeed in both of us, from our infancy; and there was naught that he would refuse to do in order to serve you or me. Conceive, therefore, the worthy lieutenant's mingled wonderment and joy when Stephen Cochrane whispered in his ear the startling fact that the King was enamoured of me, and would make me his bride if the circumstances of a secret espousal could be arranged. Redman, you know, is not particularly troubled with brains—but he is blunt and honest; and when he found that everything was to be straightforward and proper, he was easily persuaded by Cochrane of the necessity which existed for solemnizing the bridal with the strictest

secrecy. To be brief, he readily lent himself to a scheme which was so marvellously to advance my interests. At that time Father Julius was an inmate of Roslin Castle: our princely uncle had just ordered him to be set at liberty, after the return of his Highness from the great doings at Hermitage: but the priest was easily induced by Redman to remain a few hours longer to pronounce the nuptial benediction. Cochrane faithfully promised me that I should receive the most positive proofs of the strict legality of the nuptial ceremony in all its holy forms. Ah, my dear brother! it was a solemn occasion when I entered the chapel of the castle on that memorable night!—but the instant I beheld Redman, I was reassured—all mistrust vanished—I knew that he was my friend!”

“And previously, therefore, you were unaware,” remarked Fleming, inquiringly, “that he had been enlisted by Cochrane in the cause which was then in progress? In a word, you had not expected to meet Redman there?”

“No,” rejoined Margaret: “everything took place so suddenly—and everything likewise was left to the management of Stephen Cochrane! I must proceed to explain that I had not previously seen Father Julius; nor had I been informed who was to be the officiating priest. Thus, when I entered the chapel on that memorable night, it was a perfect stranger whom I beheld standing at the altar, arrayed in canonicals. But full soon did I receive the proof of Cochrane’s good faith in all that he had promised to perform: for Redman contrived in a hurried whisper to inform me that the priest who stood at the altar was Father Julius, the chaplain of Tantallon Castle; and this assurance, conveyed by the lips of Redman, proved that Cochrane was in naught deceiving me.”

“But if I mistake not,” observed Fleming, “Stephen Cochrane, while behaving loyally and faithfully to you, deceived his master the King! And this accounts for the observation which our princely uncle made this afternoon—to the effect that he had discovered how you owed much to the friendly offices of that man Cochrane on the memorable night that made you Scotland’s Queen!”

“Yes—I understand you, brother,” responded Margaret: “every circumstance has tended to make the treacherous designs of the King more and more apparent. He had doubtless ordered Cochrane to provide some wretched hireling to assume the dress and play the part of a priest—”

“Ah! is it not better, dearest Margaret,” ejaculated Lord Liddesdale, “to divert our attention from all topics that are disagreeable?”

“Assuredly so,” responded Margaret. “Oh, yes! I am well inclined to be forgiving towards the King—provided that he will keep his word, and act a kind, friendly, and generous part towards myself!”

The brother and sister continued to discourse a little while longer; and then Albertina and the other ladies were summoned from the adjoining room. Lord Liddesdale was now permitted an opportunity of some sweet conversation with his intended bride,—until it was time for the entire party to repair to the State-room, where dancing was now to take place; for the King and the male portion of the company had risen from the table in the banqueting-hall.

While the rejoicings and gaieties are progressing in the State-apartment, we will avail ourselves of the opportunity to throw in some few little explanations in addition to those which have been already given, so that we may clear the ground, as it were, ere entering upon the thrilling incidents of Queen Margaret’s career which are to occupy succeeding

chapters. We propose now to speak of Father Julius. Be it remembered that it was this priest who had suggested to the Earl of Douglas the enterprise against Roslin Castle, which failed so signally through the heroic conduct of Margaret when she beheld the eyes of the concealed Borderers riveting their gaze upon her through the barred aventayles of the panoplies in the armoury. Yes—it was Father Julius who had recommended that enterprise to the Black Douglas,—an enterprise which terminated in the loss of so many of the Earl’s best and staunchest warriors. The reader will remember that Magnus Balveny took from Father Julius the certificate of the royal marriage: but the priest knew not that Balveny himself experienced still harsher treatment almost immediately afterwards. In short, Father Julius remained in total ignorance of the circumstance that the Captain was hanged by his own excited and indignant followers. Therefore the priest naturally supposed that Magnus Balveny would return with all possible despatch to Tantallon, and place the certificate in the hands of his master the Black Earl. The priest himself dared not retrace his way to that castle: he dreaded the vengeance of the Douglas, whose fiery temper he knew would be rendered furious on learning the failure of the expedition which he (the priest) had recommended. Besides, the Black Earl (thought Father Julius to himself) would be still more embittered at having been mystified in respect to the momentous secret which his chaplain possessed, and which instead of being revealed outright to the Earl at once, had been kept back until it might suit the priest’s interest to reveal it, or else until he had discovered in which quarter he could make the best market of it. In short, there were many reasons that made Father Julius dread to return to Tantallon Castle: and he therefore sought refuge with a friendly hermit who dwelt in a wood at no very great distance from Dalkeith. There it was that Jassent so fortunately encountered Father Julius at the very nick of time when his evidence was specially needed at Dumbarton. And now these explanations lead us to the following sequel,—that Father Julius, being handsomely rewarded from the purse of Prince de Salza, took his departure from Dumbarton within a very few hours after he had solemnized the nuptials of the Earl of Douglas and the Lady Elvira Ramsay.

It was midnight: the gaieties and rejoicings were over in the State-apartment—the company had separated to their respective rooms—and silence prevailed throughout the fortalices which but a short time back had echoed to the strains of blithe music. Queen Margaret was now in an exquisitely-furnished toilet-chamber communicating with the royal suite of apartments: she was being disapparelled of her queenly attire;—titled ladies and high-born damsels were her attendants. And when these ladies had retired, and the Queen presently found herself alone with the King, she perceived that the first glance which the Monarch threw upon her was replete with impassioned admiration; and Margaret’s heart leapt with a triumphant feeling as she was thus enabled to appreciate all the power of the grand and wondrous beauty unto which that regal homage was so irresistibly paid!

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE QUESTION OF WAR OR NO WAR.

It was about eleven in the forenoon, on the day following the one which was marked by so many memorable incidents,—and there was now a very momentous question which was on the point of being settled. For this purpose King David and Prince de Salza met together in an apartment which the former was using as his private cabinet during his sojourn at Dumbarton Castle. The two potentates saluted each other with a perfect friendliness of demeanour; for, as we have already said, it was King David's policy to conciliate the Teutonic chief,—while, on the other hand, De Salza abstained, for Margaret's sake, from demonstrating towards the Scottish Monarch all he thought of those perfidious aims which he had harboured, and the iniquitous designs which he had attempted to carry out.

"Sire and brother," said King David, as he and De Salza placed themselves at a table on which there were writing-materials, "it requires not many words of preface to herald the subject which we are now met to discuss. It is all summed up in the single question—shall England be invaded by the united forces of Scotland and the Teutonic Order?"

"It will perhaps abbreviate our discourse and bring matters at once to a point," said Prince de Salza, "if I ask your Majesty whether you have yet granted a private audience to Master Stephen Cochrane?"

"No, sire and brother," responded the King: "I have not seen that individual since he appeared yesterday in the audience-hall. I sent for him yesterday afternoon, during a few minutes' leisure which I found amidst the various matters that were engrossing my attention: but he sent to say that he felt indisposed, and humbly solicited that he might be permitted to communicate with me in writing."

"And your Majesty conceded the point?" said Prince de Salza, inquiringly.

"Yes," rejoined David. "The man might have fancied that I should look or speak reproachfully; and therefore he doubtless trembled to appear in my presence. However, to be brief, I received a written statement from Cochrane an hour ago."

"And is it to your Grace's satisfaction?" asked De Salza.

David looked hard at the Prince for a few moments; and then said with a slight touch of irony in his accents, "Your Highness appears to have had speech with Stephen Cochrane immediately on his return from England; and therefore has he doubtless kept back no secrets from your knowledge?"

"Pardon me, sire and brother," interrupted De Salza, with that dignified calmness of manner which was habitual to him. "Although aware of the nature of Cochrane's mission into England, inasmuch as you yourself had communicated it to me,—yet when I met him the other day in Edinburgh, immediately after his return, I forbore from questioning him on any point except the business which I had then specially in hand, and which developed itself yesterday. No, sire!" added De Salza, proudly; "I sought not to penetrate into secrets which were entirely and exclusively your own."

"In this case," said King David, "your Highness has tidings to receive which you were far from expecting."

"Ah! is it so?" ejaculated the Teutonic chief. "Has your Majesty failed to raise in London the money which was required for that specific purpose? But no matter! The Teutonic treasury

seems to be better filled at this particular moment than that of Scotland; and the requisite funds shall be speedily forthcoming."

Prince de Salza expected to behold an air of satisfaction on the King of Scotland's countenance; he was therefore surprised when a shade of vexation passed over those handsome features, and a kindred ejaculation burst from the Monarch's mouth.

"By St. Andrew!" cried David, "it was through no want of funds that Cochrane's mission failed! Consequently your offer, generous though it be, proves useless!"

De Salza looked very hard at David, for a few moments, as if he thought that he was now developing some new phase in his slippery, perfidious disposition: and then the Teutonic chief said, "This to me is incomprehensible! It is a perfect paradox. You owe King Edward of England eighteen thousand marks—you are not deficient in the needful funds—and yet you are deploring that the money is not paid!"

"Simply because King Edward of England," replied David, "will not receive the money."

"Ah, that is indeed a solution which I little expected to account for the mystery!"—exclaimed Prince de Salza. "King Edward refuses?"

"Yes—refuses to receive the money otherwise than according to the stipulations contained in the treaty," continued David: "that is to say, at the rate of six thousand marks a year. But it is for you, sire and brother, to consider and also to determine to what extent I am bound, or must hold myself bound, by the terms of that secret treaty which was signed seven years ago."

"Your Majesty will be pleased," responded Prince de Salza, "to explain the whole matter once more, from first to last, with the minutest details—But Ah! what are these documents that lie upon the table?"

"They are the copies of the treaties—the public and the private one," answered David.

Prince de Salza opened the documents, and proceeded to peruse them with the utmost attention,—occasionally asking questions of the King. We will avail ourselves of the opportunity to explain to our readers how stood the matter which had thus become the subject of such grave attention on the part of these two potentates.

Seven years previous to the date of which we are writing, King David was liberated from captivity in London, on consenting to pay a ransom of one hundred thousand pounds, to be divided into annual instalments running over a period of ten years. This sum was guaranteed by the Scotch Parliament; and a treaty, embodying the conditions, was drawn up between the two Governments. But King Edward had demanded on the part of the still captive David, the execution of a *secret treaty*, by virtue of which the Scottish Monarch solemnly pledged himself to abstain from all hostile demonstrations towards England so long as the instalments of the ransom money should be in course of liquidation. In plain terms King David was bound over to keep the peace towards England until the ransom should have been paid off. Such was the object of the secret treaty which the policy of the English Government had extorted from King David before he was released from captivity. Seven years had now elapsed since the date; and seven instalments of the ransom had been paid:—three portions therefore remained yet to be liquidated. These explanations bring the reader to that point at which he may easily understand how it was absolutely necessary for King David to quash or recover back the secret treaty before he could declare war against

England. He thought that this would be easy enough, provided he could raise the funds for the liquidation of the three remaining instalments, amounting to eighteen thousand marks. Indeed, this appeared to be the only difficulty. David knew full well that the Parliament would not succour him in any plan which had the renewal of warfare for its ulterior object: he felt that it would be equally futile for him to appeal to the wealthy nobles of the realm, or to seek to raise a private loan amongst the goldsmiths and capitalists of Edinburgh, inasmuch as the object would be suspected, and war was not popular with those classes that would chiefly suffer by it in a pecuniary sense, however gratifying on the other hand the idea of wreaking vengeance on the Southrons might be to the masses of the population. David was sharp-witted; and he quickly conceived a project for raising the eighteen thousand marks. The French King was then a prisoner in England; and he was attended by some of the rich nobles of his Court. David despatched Stephen Cochrane to London; and the reader will bear in mind that in the twenty-fifth chapter of our narrative, we specially alluded to this mission as the reason why Cochrane did not accompany his royal master during the visit which the latter was then paying to Roslin Castle. Cochrane lost no time in repairing to the English metropolis; and there he at once held private communications with the French noblemen. The offer he had to make on the part of his royal master was plain and simple enough. "King David would declare war against England, if he were in the first instance provided with eighteen thousand marks to liquidate the remainder of the ransom-money due to King Edward." The French nobles, rejoiced at the prospect of beholding England embarrassed by hostilities on the part of Scotland, cheerfully undertook to provide the eighteen thousand marks. Stephen Cochrane then presented his credentials to the officials of the English treasury, to the effect that he was charged to liquidate the remainder of the ransom-money on behalf of the Scottish King. But the English Government—either suspecting some treacherous intent, or else deeming it prudent to hold fast to existing guarantees—declined to receive the three remaining instalments in any other manner than in accordance with the terms of the public treaty—namely, by annual payments. Cochrane's mission therefore failed at the very point where no difficulty had been apprehended; and he was compelled to return to Scotland, baffled and discomfited.

This, therefore, was the unexpected position of affairs which King David and Prince de Salza were now to discuss in that private cabinet. It was with an inscrutable countenance that the Teutonic chief perused the draft of the secret treaty: David watched him anxiously—but De Salza's features afforded no clue to the impression which the document was making on his mind.

"And now what do you think, sire and brother?" asked David, as De Salza raised his looks from the paper which lay before him on the table.

"This secret treaty," responded the Teutonic chief, "is very stringent and very binding, and affords a strong proof of the excellence of English diplomacy."

"And your Highness thinks," asked David, "that I am to hold myself bound by that document?"

"Unquestionably, sire!" responded De Salza. "As a king, as a true knight, and as a man, you are in every sense bound!—bound by the principles of good faith which should subsist between monarchs as the representatives of nations—bound

by all the obligations of chivalry—bound likewise by the laws of honour which prevail amongst men!"

David bit his lip with vexation on hearing Prince de Salza speak thus positively and emphatically; and then he snatched the copy of the treaty towards him.

"It is useless, sire," continued the Teutonic warrior, "to search in the hope of finding a loophole of escape. You will discover none!"

"But the plain sense of the business," exclaimed David, "is that I am bound not to proclaim war until the ransom-money be liquidated—and I offer to pay it!"

"That is not all," said De Salza. "By the public treaty the ransom money is divided into ten portions, to be distributed over as many years. If England choose to insist upon the execution of this treaty to the very letter, she may assert her right to receive payment *only* at the specified periods. She need not suffer herself to be paid off before the time, any more than on the other hand she would have a right to insist to be so prematurely paid off. It is clear that the English Government had these facts in view when inducing your Majesty to sign the supplementary or secret treaty. This sets at rest any doubt which might exist as to the intentions of England at the time;—and the spirit of the treaties must be adhered to."

"And yet, methought," said David, somewhat sarcastically, "that your Highness was too anxious to have a brush with England to regard with such scrupulous closeness the terms of a document drawn up with more sophistry than liberality—"

"Sire," interrupted Prince de Salza, fixing his looks with stern dignity upon the King, "whether I were anxious to have an opportunity of helping to avenge Scotland's honour against England, you ought surely to be enabled to judge. Fifteen hundred of my troops have already landed upon the Scottish shores—and upwards of eighteen thousand more are on their way, proceeding by forced marches through Germany and Holland, to embark at the various Dutch ports. Therefore, sire, you must not—you *dare* not doubt—"

"Dare?" echoed David, with a slight start; and the colour flitted across his countenance—for his bravery was unquestionable.

"Yes, sire—I used the word *dare*," continued De Salza, with the same calm dignity as before. "The term was extracted from my lips by a species of taunt which had just fallen from your's. But let that pass! Your Majesty knows full well that I should have been rejoiced to draw my sword for Scotland: but I may not do so when Scotland's King finds his hands tied and his arms bound by the stringency of treaties which have yet three years to endure. Neither Scotland nor her Monarch must appear before the world in the light of the flagitious violator of the most solemn compacts!"

King David reflected for a moment with downcast looks and a deep shade upon his countenance: but suddenly raising his eyes, while his handsome features brightened up all in a moment, he exclaimed, "Well, Prince, it is but a question of time—and that time a short one! Three years—no more! My vengeance has now waited eighteen long years since the fatal day of Nevill's Cross; and to curb it yet for the sixth portion of that period ought to be a matter of comparative ease! At all events, it has now become a necessity so to do!—and I who only reckon forty years of age!—Ah, yes! I must have patience! But tell me, sire and brother—give me the assurance that at the expiration of these three years our compact shall rest the same?"

"Fear not," interrupted Prince de Salza, "that

'at the expiration of three years I shall be less anxious to vindicate the honour of Scotland than I am at this present moment. God alone can dispose of future events:—but if all circumstances be propitious, your Majesty may rely upon the succour of twenty thousand Teutonic warriors for the midsummer of 1867, as you have been assured thereof in the midsummer of this year, 1864."

"And then," cried David, with a display of that martial enthusiasm which was one of the elements of his character,—"and then shall the holy rood be recovered from the Cathedral of Durham and restored to the Abbey of Edinburgh!"

The two potentates now separated; and it soon became known throughout the fortalice that the order had been issued for the embarkation of the great bulk of the Teutonic warriors—so that those who had begun to fathom the King's purpose, discovered that after all there was to be no war with England, at least for the present. The general feeling amongst the nobility and wealthier orders was that of satisfaction at the prospect of a continued peace: but amongst the masses of the population the disappointment was great. Upon the analysis of these feelings we do not however purpose to dwell, inasmuch as we have now more important subjects to engage our attention.

Shortly after this interview with King David, Prince de Salza sent to order Stephen Cochrane to appear in his presence. This individual obeyed the mandate with alacrity; and making a low obeisance to the Prince, he said, "I trust that your Highness was satisfied with the manner in which I fulfilled my part yesterday?"

"I was well satisfied, Master Cochrane," answered De Salza: "and I failed not to mention your name most favourably to Queen Margaret. I promised a suitable reward and I am prepared to accomplish my pledge. But perhaps you yourself have some boon to demand?—perhaps you can point out the way in which your interests may best be served? For instance, does your ambition aspire to some exalted post in the household of Queen Margaret?"

"No, sire," answered Cochrane: "for inasmuch as I have no doubt mortally offended the King, such a post as the one your Highness speaks of, would be but an uncomfortable one, even if it were to prove tenable. Therefore, with due deference, I purpose to place, with the least possible delay, some few hundreds of miles betwixt my own humble carcase and the august person of his Scottish Majesty."

"And perhaps your resolve is a prudent one, Cochrane," said the Teutonic chief. "Am I therefore to conclude that you wish to be enlisted in my service—to follow me to Marienburg?"

"A thousand thanks, sire, for this gracious consideration on the part of your Highness:—and Cochrane bowed almost to the ground: "but I am utterly unacquainted with foreign languages—and moreover I have a special desire for the enjoyment of an interval of peace and quiescence. In brief, sire, I propose to return into England—where methinks that I have some relations living——"

"Follow your own inclinations," said the Prince; "and see that in future you avoid those intrigues and machinations whereof methinks you have been a trifle too fond. However, it is not for me to preach, seeing that you have served my purposes so faithfully. And now accept this jewel and this purse. The latter will defray your expenses for a long time to come: the former, if judiciously disposed of to an honest dealer, will produce the wherewith to give you bread for the rest of your life."

Stephen Cochrane received the purse that was

heavy with gold, and likewise the splendid ring which De Salza drew from his finger. He then made a low obeisance, and issued forth from the apartment where this interview took place. Proceeding to the stables, Stephen Cochrane ordered a groom to saddle his horse; and as he rode down the steep descending pathway from Dumbarton Castle, he muttered to himself, "Now with the least possible delay to London!—and if I fail to add to my wealth the eighteen thousand marks of the French nobles, then shall it be said that there never was a duller dog than Stephen Cochrane!"

While the interview of which we have been speaking was taking place between Cochrane and Prince de Salza, the King had sought Margaret in her own apartment.

"Tell me, my beloved Queen," he said, with the most courteous and agreeable smile, "have you thought of signifying your desire to the high and mighty Prince de Salza, to the effect that mercy and leniency be shown towards that unfortunate woman who got herself into such a terrible dilemma?"

"Your Majesty means the Countess of Morton," interjected Margaret, with a countenance that betrayed not the slightest feeling of irritation at the mention of the name. "Oh, yes! that matter was attended to the very first thing this morning. His Highness Prince de Salza sent down a command to Sir Herman de Sarsfeldt, to the effect that he was to liberate the Countess of Morton and her dependant forthwith."

"Twas generously done, Margaret!" exclaimed the King. "And therefore," he went on to say, eyeing her furtively, "as everything is now forgiven, I presume you will still demonstrate the same loftiness of mind; and if the Countess of Morton should seek to pay her respects to you here——"

"I no not think it is likely," answered Margaret, with the calmest composure, yet with a certain degree of firm self-possession; "for there were a couple of her ladyship's men-at-arms here in the castle—and likewise another of her disguised pages——"

"Well?" said the King inquiringly, still watching the handsome countenance of his Queen in a somewhat furtive manner.

"Well," she continued, "I sent these dependants off to join their mistress without delay, so that they might be the bearers of a message——"

"A message?" said the King, 'playing with his sword-knot.

"Yes—a message from me, the Queen," proceeded Margaret, "to the Countess of Morton, as a Scotch peeress,—earnestly recommending her to return as soon as she possibly can, to the arms of her well-beloved husband, at his residence somewhere on the other side of the Scottish border."

The King bit his lip—but instantaneously averted his countenance, to prevent the betrayal of the vexation and displeasure which he inwardly experienced: but almost immediately reassuming an outward expression of affability, good humour, and even tenderness, he glided with characteristic ease into a conversation upon general topics.

Meanwhile the Grand Master of the Teutons was still thinking of the interests of his beloved niece, the Queen of Scotland; and as he paced to-and fro in his apartment shortly after his interview with Stephen Cochrane, he said to himself. "At all events, for three years the happiness of Margaret is safe! David will not dare do aught to render her unhappy or discontented!—he will not venture to give her reason to complain! He will need the succour of twenty thousand brave Teutons belong-

ing to my invincible armies! He knows that I am interested in the welfare of his Queen; and thus I need have but little care on this score for three years to come! And yet—and yet,” continued Prince de Salza, in a musing strain, “it were well if I left some one to keep watch—to forward me occasional intelligence—to maintain an eye upon the King’s proceedings—”

At this moment a page entered the apartment: and with a low obeisance, announced that Conrad Rossel sought an audience of his Highness.

“Admit him,” said Prince de Salza: and in a few minutes the Countess of Morton’s brother stood in the presence of the Grand Master.

“Pardon me, sire,” said Conrad, “for thus intruding on your privacy: but I have come to express my most heartfelt thanks to your august Highness—and, through the medium of your Highness, to her gracious Majesty the Queen for the free and full pardon which has been vouchsafed unto my sister.”

“You must thank the Queen far more than me, Conrad,” said the Grand Master; “for I assure you, that painful though the subject be to treat of in the presence of the delinquent’s brother, yet so outrageous had been the conduct of your sister that I should have left her at the disposal of Queen Margaret—”

“I know, sire,” interjected Rossel, with an expression of countenance in which mournfulness and gratitude were commingled, “that the crimes of my sister towards Queen Margaret were great and manifold; and to think therefore that the Queen should have been so graciously pleased to pardon that erring woman—Oh! it was noble! it was grand!”

“With this impression on your mind,” said De Salza, “your gratitude is all the greater towards the Queen?”

“It is a gratitude, sire,” rejoined Conrad fervently, “which I can never have the hope of effectually displaying: but yet I would lay down my life in order to demonstrate it!”

“Ah! say you so?” ejaculated the Prince, as a thought struck him: and then he reflected for a few moments. “Conrad,” he continued, “you have been attached to my service for some years—you have behaved well and faithfully. I now purpose to bestow the reward which you have merited. Kneel! What ho! Who waits without?”

Two pages entered; and instantaneously comprehending what was about to take place, they stationed themselves one on the right hand, the other on the left hand of the kneeling individual. The Prince drew his sword—touched this individual upon his shoulder—and said, “By the guardian saints of the holy Teutonic Order, and by the sacred keys of Acre, I dub thee Knight! Be faithful, chivalrous, and just! Rise, Sir Conrad Rossel!”

The newly-made Knight rose from his kneeling posture; and expressed in fervid terms his gratitude to Prince de Salza for the distinguished honour just conferred upon him. The pages bowed and withdrew.

“Sir Conrad,” said the Grand Master, “I am about to give you a distinguished proof of the high confidence which I place in you.”

“Command me, sire, to the death!” was the enthusiastic response.

“Sir Conrad,” continued the Prince, “to-morrow I embark with the remainder of my troops, in order to return to my own dominions. Fain would I tarry yet awhile in Scotland to be present at the bridal of the young Lord of Liddesdale and the beauteous Lady Albertina Roslin: but I may not spare the time—for the circumstances of my govern-

ment require my presence at Marienburg. I propose to leave you behind me in Scotland—”

“Command me, sire,” said the newly-made Knight.

“You have but one special duty to perform,” continued the Prince. “It is to watch over the interests of Queen Margaret, without seeming to do so—to be near her, without being seen—to maintain a watchful eye over the proceedings of the King—and in case of need to take any measures that circumstances may suggest. It is not necessary that any one should know who you are; and if there be the means of disguising yourself—”

“The barber’s razor applied to my face, sire,” interjected Sir Conrad, “together with the costume of a simple gentleman, or of a knight belonging to these islands, will doubtless suffice.”

“Be it so,” said the Prince. “You understand me well? On this head I need say no more. Ah! from time to time you may call upon the worthy Abbot Benedictus of Melrose—an old and beloved friend of mine; and to him may you make such reports as you deem necessary. Your sister has, I believe, taken her departure?”

“Yes, sire,” rejoined Sir Conrad: “she is now on the shortest route which will bear her to Carlisle. And may heaven grant that the lessons she has received during her sojourn upon the Scottish soil, will produce a beneficial effect!”

“Amen,” said Prince de Salza. “Ah! there is one thing I ought to have observed,—which is, that not even Queen Margaret herself need know that you are specially appointed by me to watch over her interests—unless there should arrive a moment, through the pressure of circumstances, when you may deem it expedient to communicate to her the mission with which you are charged.”

Sir Conrad Rossel knelt and kissed the hand of the Grand Master; and with renewed protestations of gratitude and zeal, he went forth from the presence of the Prince.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE LAPSE OF THREE YEARS.

OUR narrative is now about to take a leap of three years. Yes!—three years must be supposed to have passed away since all those memorable events at the Castle of Dumbarton!—three years, during which nothing of any consequence occurred requiring special mention in the pages of our story—unless it be that the birth of an heir had blessed the happy nuptial couch of Lord and Lady Liddesdale.

Three years, then, had passed—the third midsummer had arrived since that one in which so many momentous incidents had taken place—and it was now the middle of the year 1867. Within the last few weeks there had been bustle and activity at Dalkeith Castle: masons and carpenters had been occupied in making repairs to the edifice—upholders and decorators, painters and craftsmen of various denominations, had displayed all possible expedition in renovating those numerous suites of apartments that had for so long a period been neglected and apparently abandoned to dilapidation. Rich draperies were substituted for the decaying tapestries—sumptuous furniture gave an air of luxury and comfort to the interior of the hitherto cheerless pile. And why were all these preparations being made?—wherefore were all these arrangements taking place? The Countess of Morton was coming to pass some time at Dalkeith Castle.

It was evening, in the beginning of July, 1867; and in one of those sumptuously furnished apartments we now find the Countess seated. She had arrived in the middle of that day, attended by a becoming retinue; and gladly was she welcomed by the steward Lockyer and his buxom daughter Janet. The Countess evidently had not forgotten how Janet was a sharer in her perilous adventures three years back, in the valley of the Leven; for she greeted the young female with much kindness, and with a significant smile whisperingly alluded to those times when they roamed together disguised in male apparel.

But it was now evening, we say; and the Countess was seated in one of the renovated apartments. She had partaken of a luxurious banquet; and she carefully superintended the spreading of the table with an exquisite dessert,—the choicest fruits and the most delicious wines being arranged upon the board. Her ladyship was apparelled in the most elegant manner; and to prevent any mistake, we may add that she wore a garb becoming her sex. She evidently expected some one; for every time the door opened she gave a slight start and flung her looks with anxious expectation in that direction. Every now and then some beautiful young female or another, belonging to her retinue (Minnie amongst the rest) looked in to ascertain that her ladyship had everything that she required and that she wanted for nothing; but it evidently was not one of these whom the Countess expected to see enter by the door. The clepsydra, or water-clock, indicated the hour of eight, when the massive velvet curtain covering the doorway was thrust aside; and some one glided into the apartment. It was not Minnie—neither was it the attentive and watchful Janet—nor was it the steward Lockyer, to demand any fresh instructions of her ladyship: it was not any one of the beautiful females of her suite;—but it was the very antidote of everything in the shape of beauty!—it was one of the most abominably hideous dwarfs that ever formed an item of the great mass of humanity!

This little wretch, stunted and deformed, seemed to be so singular a combination of limbs, body, and head, that all these component parts of his form looked as if they had been tossed together anyhow, rather in some freak of nature than with a due regard to anatomical order. That great head of his appeared to be set right upon the middle of his shoulders without the intermediary aid of any neck: his arms were twice the length which they ought to be in reference to his height, which was about three feet: his legs were crooked and thin like those of a baboon, and gave him a queer shambling gait, although he glided along when he chose with a singular swiftness. His whole frame worked as if with a dislocating process of the limbs in this rapid locomotion, so that it was painful to look upon, although it evidently was not painful to himself. His matted hair and beard, of a yellowish colour, gave to that great head the appearance of a very ugly lion's head placed upon the circumvolved form of some vile stunted imp. It was difficult to determine his age: but it was in reality about forty;—and he bore the singular name of Mompesson.

Such was the hideous-looking being that now glided into the sumptuously furnished apartment; and making an awkward obeisance to the Countess, he said, "In an hour his Majesty will be here."

"Good!" cried Louisa. "You saw his Majesty?"

"At Edinburgh Castle. I delivered your ladyship's message—and that was the reply."

"And the Queen?" said the Countess: "did you

ask whether her Majesty is still at Urquhart Castle—"

"In Inverness-shire?" interjected Mompesson. "Yes—her Highness is there. It seems to be her Grace's favourite seat."

"Tis well," said the Countess: and she made a motion for the dwarf to retire.

The moment he disappeared behind the velvet curtain, an expression of proudest triumph appeared upon Louisa's countenance; and she murmured to herself, "Ah, then, he is faithful to his promise, and obedient to the first summons which I send him! Everything must be ravishing and intoxicating here, so as to produce a grand first impression upon the royal mind!"

The Countess rose from her seat—surveyed herself in a mirror—and smiled with a peculiar satisfaction, as she murmured, "Unchanged by the lapse of time! Handsomer than ever! And he shall find me so!"

She returned to her seat,—where she remained, in a species of half-triumphant reverie, until the clepsydra told her that it was within a few minutes of nine o'clock: she then agitated a little silver bell which stood upon the table; and Mompesson again glided into the room.

"Tell the harpists to come," said the Countess; "and you keep watch for the King, so as to introduce him hither at the moment of his arrival."

The dwarf bowed, and again withdrew. In about a minute two young females, of exquisite beauty, and dressed in the most captivating style, entered the apartment. They arranged their music-books, and seated themselves at their harps, which were two splendid instruments of a fashion lately imported into England from France; for the Countess had purchased them during a recent visit to London. The Countess gave the damsels to understand that she presently expected Royalty as her guest, and that they were therefore to put forth all their skill in the art wherein they were so proficient; for the Countess knew that David was dotingly fond of music, and that nothing rendered his soul so pliant and ductile as the ravishing strains of instrumental and vocal melody combined. The harpists promised to do their best; and they were proud at the idea of having to perform in the presence of Scotland's King.

In a few more minutes the door was heard to open; and while the velvet curtain, as it was being thrust aside, made the gilt rings rattle upon their rod, the snowy white arms of the damsels were thrown across the handsome harps, and the golden harmony rolled through the apartment. King David made his appearance: the curtain was closed, and the door was shut behind him. The Countess hastened forward to meet the Scottish Monarch; and the voices of the two damsels began to pour forth a delicious melody in accompaniment to the rich music which emanated from the instruments. The King took the hand of the Countess—gazed upon her for a moment with a look of unfeigned joy at this meeting—and pressed that hand to his lips. He then conducted her back to her seat with all that graceful courtesy of an accomplished cavalier which he so well knew how to display; and during the few moments which had only as yet elapsed since his entrance, he and the Countess had rapidly yet, attentively surveyed each other, as if for the mutual purpose of ascertaining whether the lapse of three years had made much change in their appearance.

And it had made none—at least not for the worse. The King was now forty-three years of age; and there was not the faintest streak of grey in his dark brown hair,—not even so much as that slight red-



dish tint which indicates when the hair is undergoing a transition towards greyness. There was not a wrinkle upon his countenance. As for his figure, instead of having acquired corpulency, it was even somewhat more slender than when we first introduced him to our readers; and this symmetrical slimness of the shape—together with the complete beardlessness of the countenance in all except a slight moustache setting off the curve of the well-cut upper lip—gave him an appearance singularly youthful. He was elegantly dressed, and in every sense bore the outward demeanour of one of the most fascinating cavaliers of the age.

The hasty yet attentive survey which the Countess of Morton took of King David, was thus completely satisfactory. He, on the other hand, was instantaneously struck by the conviction that the Countess of Morton was indeed as she wished to appear—that is to say, handsomer than ever. She was in her thirty-fourth year; and if there were the slightest change in her since we first presented her to our readers, it was that her form had taken a somewhat more luxurious development—thus adding to the splendour of her rich beauty as a woman, while militating somewhat against the possibility of disguising herself, if the freak should take her, in the garb of a knight, as in those times when she so successfully played the part of Sir Louis Carion. Moreover, she now wore her hair longer than at that period; and it descended in heavy clusters upon her shoulders and her bosom. But there was the same half-joyous, half-sensuous glance of the full blue eyes—the same hues of vigorous health upon the cheeks—the same ivory whiteness and admirable preservation of the teeth—the same danger in the looks as well as in the soul of the Countess of Morton!

The strain of music ceased; the damsels rose from their harps—and after making graceful curtsies to the King, were preparing to withdraw, when he exclaimed gaily, "What! do ye not tarry for the wonted *luzgasse*?"

He then gave the foremost harpist his well-filled purse: again the damsels saluted the Monarch with graceful curtsies; and then the velvet drapery closed behind them.

"Now we are alone, my dear Louisa!" said the King, bestowing upon her lips a kiss far less restrained than that which he had on his first entrance imprinted on her hand; "and, Oh! I am rejoiced to see you—for we have a thousand things to talk of!"

CHAPTER LXVIII.

DAVID AND LOUISA.

THE King sat down by the side of the Countess of Morton: he filled two goblets with wine—and they pledged each other in the delicious nectar.

"Thus three years have passed away!" said David in a musing strain,—"three years since you and I last beheld each other within these walls!"

"And then," said the Countess significantly, "we were plotting to prevent a lady from becoming Queen of Scotland. But now—"

"But now?" said the King—and he in his turn looked significantly at his companion. "Well, then, let the truth be spoken. Now, my dear Louisa, I must confess that I have scarcely ever failed to curse myself for the infatuation which first of all placed me in the power of that designing woman!"

"And I, who for nearly three years," ejaculated the Countess, "had been giving you credit for leading the happiest married life possible, until I re-

ceived the letter with which you honoured me! No—I will not use so formal a word: I will say the letter which *rejoiced* me: for when you gave me to understand that there was now no earthly reason why I should not visit my husband's castle of Dalkeith, if I thought fit, I recognised therein a proof that you had not forgotten me!"

"And perhaps, Louisa," interjected the King, with a smile, "the natural wit of woman told you that I should not have been very much displeased to see you once more?"

"It was thus that I flattered myself, sire," responded the Countess. "In a word, I felt convinced that I should have the pleasure of receiving you at Dalkeith; and therefore I lost no time in commanding such arrangements to be made as should be calculated to afford your Majesty a suitable reception."

"And everything is well done," replied the King, glancing around the sumptuously furnished apartment,—“yes, even to those superb harps and the beautiful girls who were just now seated at them. But, Ah! my dear Louisa!" continued David, "you could not possibly have thought that I should forget you?—and when you sent a message some few weeks back in reply to my communication, to the effect that you would lose no time in putting Dalkeith in suitable repair, did I not transmit in return the assurance that the moment I should receive your summons to come hither, it would be obeyed?"

"Yes, sire," answered the Countess, turning her large blue eyes with a soft languor upon the King: "and you know not the amount of joy that was infused into my heart when I received so gracious a proof of your royal friendship!"

"And so you thought, Louisa," resumed the King, "that I was leading a most blissful life with Margaret—playing the uxorious perhaps?"

"The world, sire," resumed the Countess, "says your union is a happy one; and I confess that I for a while shared the general opinion. Indeed, how could I have entertained any other impression in the presence of facts? Your Majesty has dwelt almost constantly with your beauteous Queen: the tongue of rumour has not failed to whisper how the most costly jewels and the most sumptuous articles of raiment have been procured by your Majesty from London, from Paris, and from Holland, as gifts for the Queen; and it is likewise reported that naught can transcend the elegance with which your Highness has furnished Urquhart Castle since it has pleased her Grace the Queen to make it her favourite country-seat. In short, sire," added the Countess of Morton, "every circumstance seemed to indicate that your connubial happiness was complete."

"And you, Louisa," said the King, "who so well knew how much I battled three years ago to assign unto Margaret the place of a mistress only, and to defeat her ambition when she craved the sceptre and the crown of a queen—you who knew of this—you too who were enabled to read more deeply than the rest of the world into the secrets of my heart, is it possible that you could have fancied my wedded life was characterised by happiness and that I have been contented with my lot?"

"Such indeed were my impressions," rejoined the Countess, "until I received that welcome letter which showed me that I was not altogether forgotten; and then I began to think that perhaps the world was deceived—that you, sire, had only been playing a part—"

"Yes, yes—it was so!" ejaculated the King. "But previous to the receipt of that letter—"

"I thought as the world thought—and as the

world still thinks—that your marriage is a happy one. I fancied that when once you felt yourself indissolubly tied to Margaret—that she was really your wife, and that circumstances had compelled you to acknowledge her as your Queen—I thought that you had abandoned yourself to her fascinations and given free scope to the infatuation which at the very outset made you her slave.”

“And to a certain extent it was so,” said the King: “and then came satiety—and, in short, after everything which had taken place betwixt Margaret and me, the terrible warfare we had waged, and that hard battle we had fought, a peace based upon a permanent friendliness became an impossibility! It soon showed itself in its true light—a mere truce! a suspension of hostilities!”

“But it has not shown itself to the world,” interjected the Countess of Morton.

“No:—we have both, as if by tacit consent, kept terms with each other, and outwardly maintained all those amenities and courtesies—I may even say tenderesses—which usually characterize a happy married life. Do you not see, Louisa, that pride and policy have respectively influenced us?”

“Explain yourself, sire,” said the Countess. “The pride, I presume, has been with her Majesty the royal Margaret?”

“Exactly so,” explained the King. “By St. Andrew! she has more of the sex’s peculiar pride than any other woman in existence! It would hurt her dignity to be thought unloved or uncared for! Thus, when ever and anon she meets her brother Lord Liddesdale, and her sister-in-law Albertina, or the Earl of Caithness—or any one else, in fine, who bears a special interest in her—she assures them each and all that she is supremely happy.”

“And is she not so in reality?” inquired the Countess.

“Ah! her’s is a soul which it is not very easy to fathom,” rejoined the King. “Doubtless, however, her spirit chafes as she becomes more and more convinced that I do not love her—that the fever-heat of an infatuated passion has long since subsided—and that in the depths of my own heart I bitterly repent the folly of a few hours which has enmeshed me for years!”

“But, as you have said, sire, her Majesty’s pride sustains her. Now, on your part there has been policy——”

“Yes,” returned David: “my game has been that of an astute policy. You know how deep was the interest which Prince de Salza took in Margaret and her brother——”

“Has your Majesty ever discovered the reason of that interest?” inquired the Countess.

“I have not been enabled to arrive at a certainty upon the point,” responded David; “nor indeed is it one of very much consequence. But my suspicion is that Prince de Salza is in reality a member of the Logie family.”

“An excellent solution of the mystery!” cried the Countess. “But, as you say, it now matters little enough: for whatever the cause may be, there is the fact that the Grand Master of the Teutons did most warmly espouse the side of Margaret.”

“It was he who made her Queen of Scotland!” exclaimed the King; “for had he performed another part, I should have assuredly stifled all her pretensions and beaten down all her claims, notwithstanding the treacherous trick which Stephen Cochrane had played me in substituting a real priest for a sham one. But let us not revert to those details of past matters which it is now useless to dwell upon. I was speaking of the policy which for three years has influenced my conduct towards Margaret——”

“I begin to comprehend,” said the Countess. “You had reasons for remaining on amicable terms with the Grand Master of the Teutons; and you knew that this amity could only be sustained so long as he had reason to believe that you sought to render his *protégée* Margaret happy?”

“The conjecture is accurate,” said David: “you have rightly surmised the motive of my policy. For three years have my hands been bound by certain treaties with England; and I have been looking forward to the moment, when the last instalment of the ransom-money being paid, I should find myself in a position to declare war against the haughty Southrons and their tyrant King Edward. Prince de Salza gave me his pledge that when the time should come for unfurling the Scottish banner, twenty thousand gallant knights of the Red Cross should be placed at my disposal; and therefore it has suited me well to treat Margaret in a style that might please the Grand Master of the Teutons. Hence I have ministered to Margaret’s extravagancies; and making a merit of my own position, so to speak, I have bestowed upon her in the seeming light of voluntary gifts, those costly jewels and sumptuous dresses which she would have otherwise ordered on the credit of the Scottish Treasury.”

“And now,” said the Countess, “the last instalment of the ransom-money has been paid, doubtless?”

“The last instalment, of six thousand marks, was paid last week in London,” rejoined the King.

“And the treaties which so stringently bound your Highness?” said Louisa.

“Those treaties cease to exist,” answered David.

“And now therefore your Majesty is bent on war?” exclaimed the Countess, an uneasy expression settling upon her features.

“Ah!” ejaculated the King on perceiving that look: “you are averse to war? you tremble at the idea thereof?”

“I tremble for you, sire,” said the Countess.

“How for me?” demanded David. “Think you that the Scottish army, leagued with twenty thousand of the best warriors of Christendom, would not avenge the fatal day of Nevill’s Cross?”

“Doubtless, sire,” rejoined Louisa, “Scotland would be triumphant and your Majesty would retrieve all the fatal past. It is not therefore defeat that I apprehend: but——”

“But what?” demanded David. “Speak out—and speak plainly, Louisa!”

“In the first place,” continued the Countess, “there would be humiliations for you, sire, in the very victories that would be won! Who would claim those victories? The Teutonic Knights! They would say, ‘The Scotch are beaten when they fight alone; but with us they are victorious!’—and then all the laurels would be greedily grasped and self-appropriated by those Teutons.”

“True!” said the King: “this has likewise struck me. But have you any other reason, Louisa to advance against that war which I have longed to proclaim against England?”

“Yes,” returned the Countess: “and a reason which is perhaps more potent than the one that I have already set forth. But dare I enunciate my views?”

“Proceed,” said the King, whose countenance was now grave and serious.

“The Teutonic Knights,” continued Louisa, “will come as friends: but may they not remain as enemies? They will come to assist you to conquer the Southrons: but may they not assume the insolent attitude of conquerors of the Scotch? You agree with me that they would arrogate to themselves all the honours of victory:—they would

therefore look upon the Scotch as a people whom they succoured and saved; and hence, from this very fact, would arise an irresistible idea of superiority on the part of the Teutons. But this is not all! Prince de Salza is ambitious—he possesses the mightiest army of Christendom—and he might pour into Scotland legions sufficiently numerous to overcome the possibility of opposition. Of what avail were it to Scotland to trample upon England, if in her turn she were destined to crouch beneath the iron heel of the Teutonic Order?"

"All this is true, Louisa," said King David, with mournful thoughtfulness.

"But still it is not all!" proceeded the Countess: "there are other arguments yet to be urged. Let us suppose that Prince de Salza might not go so far as to aspire at the conversion of Scotland into a province of the Teutonic dominion:—yet might he not at least endeavour to establish Teutonic influences here in a paramount degree? This is natural: it is the ambition of all princes to make their policy or their arms felt wherever they have an opportunity to display such superiority. And no matter whether Prince de Salza be a relative of Queen Margaret or not,—very certain it is that he has established paramount claims upon her gratitude; and thus if once the Knights of the Teutonic Order obtained a footing on the Scottish soil, they would have all the influence of Scotland's Queen to back them in their ambitious aims or political machinations. And there is yet one more consideration—"

"Speak it, Louisa," said David, perceiving that the Countess hesitated. "Speak it, I entreat!—nay, I command you!"

"Well, sire, you shall be obeyed," continued the Countess. "The Queen, as I have said, would support all the views and interests of Prince de Salza for the subjection and degradation of Scotland. You, sire, would do your duty: but what if the detestable intrigues of those on the opposite side reached to such an extreme as to involve your dethronement as the only condition of their success? Remember, sire, the Queen has a brother—young, enterprising, and gallant—doubtless ambitious likewise—at all events a noble already powerful—aye, and the very one who was appointed to command the Teutonic auxiliaries three years ago, and who would doubtless be nominated to the same post again!"

"Enough, Louisa!" ejaculated King David, wiping from his brow the perspiration which within the last few minutes had been collecting there, cold and clammy. "Enough, I repeat!—your reasoning is sufficient! In short, within the last few weeks everything you have just urged with such painful truthfulness, has suggested itself to my mind. To be brief, Louisa, my resolve was taken—or at least as good as taken—when I wrote the letter which was intended as an invitation for you to return to Scotland."

"And there shall be no war, sire?" asked the Countess, with a feverish joy at the decision.

"There shall be no war, Louisa," rejoined the King. "Circumstances are such in consequence of the feuds among my principal nobles, and the poverty of my treasury, that I cannot make war without the aid of Prince de Salza and his Teutonic troops. But on the other hand, it were the most flagrant impolicy to invoke that succour—and consequently there shall be no war at all!"

"And you thus abandon, as if it were all in a moment," exclaimed the Countess, "the idea and hope which you have been cherishing for years?"

"It is strange, Louisa—and yet it is most true," answered the King, "that none of these considerations ever began to suggest themselves to my

mind until the moment was approaching when I should find myself the master of my actions, released from the stringent bonds of treaties, and at liberty to maintain peace or proclaim war according to my own good will and pleasure. *Then* it seemed as if I no sooner approached near the brink of the precipice, than all the countless evils and perils which had remained unseen while I was yet at a distance, sprang up and trooped around me. In short, I one day came to the resolve that there should be no war; and inasmuch as my reasons for this decision were word for word the same as those that you have enunciated, I listened with attention while they were flowing from your lips."

"And thus your decision was already arrived at, sire," said the Countess, "when you wrote me that kind and gracious letter which seemed to be the renewal of a friendship that I feared was forgotten?"

"No sooner was my mind made up," responded the King, "than I wrote to you. Ah! you do not understand? That resolve which I took made me my own master, and enabled me to throw off a mask which for three years I had worn. To be brief, I no longer care about conciliating Prince de Salza: and therefore I need not play the part of a dissimulating policy towards Margaret."

"Ah! this is courageous and manly on your part!" exclaimed the wily Louisa, enveloping him as it were with the whole luminous power of her eyes, and caressingly touching his cheek with her warm soft hand. "All the time that you were playing the game of dissimulation and hypocrisy, you were in reality wearing the chains which rendered you the slave of—"

The Countess stopped short, and flung down her looks as if with a species of alarm.

"Why do you thus pause?" asked David.

"I was about to tread on delicate ground, sire," rejoined the Countess, with a semblance of hesitation and timidity: "I was about to speak disrespectfully of Scotland's Queen."

"Ah! by St. Andrew! if that be all," ejaculated David, with a low ironical laugh, "speak without fear or diffidence. You have my leave and license. You were going to say that I have been wearing the chain, so to speak, of slavery and servitude towards the interests of a designing and ambitious woman?"

"Such was my meaning, sire," answered the Countess; "because every consideration which led you to minister to the extravagancies of her Majesty Queen Margaret—"

"Was an act of submission and slavery?" exclaimed the King. "Yes! I know it—and I feel it! But now I may throw off the mask—I have no longer an interest in conciliating Prince de Salza—no longer a necessity therefore for maintaining appearances with Margaret! But tell me, my fair Louisa—your husband—"

"Still the devoted servant of your Majesty, as heretofore," replied the Countess, with a slight passing smile of mingled pity and contempt as she thought of the Earl of Morton. "Inasmuch as your Grace's letters expressed no desire to see my husband, he considered it his paramount duty to remain absent—"

"Ah, my dear Louisa," interrupted the King, upon whose soul the ravishing music had made a first impression which was now being enhanced by the mingled effects of delicious wine and tender looks,— "Ah, my dear Louisa! there would be so much restraint if the Earl were present—though I never can forget that he has ever been a most faithful and loving subject!"

"Nevertheless," said Louisa curtly, "your Majesty does not need his counsel or advice at the present moment; while in respect to his fair domain

of Dalkeith I am fully competent to make alterations and suggest improvements—"

"Which will seem to be a most fitting and reasonable excuse," interjected David, "for your presence here."

"And my sojourn at Dalkeith," added the Countess, fixing a look of tender meaning upon the King, "shall be of shorter or longer duration according to your Majesty's pleasure."

David thought that he had never seen the Countess of Morton looking more truly handsome than she was at this moment; and he suddenly experienced towards her all the strong passion which he had felt in her behalf in earlier years, at the time when she became his mistress. Passing his arm round her waist, he murmured in her ear, "Ah, my dear Louisa! if you had not thought fit to marry the Earl of Morton—and if I had not counselled you to do so at the time—which I did with the best possible intention, that you might have a fixed and settled position—"

"But if this had not happened?" said the Countess, with the half-hushed breath of suspense: "if I had not married the Earl?"

"Ah! if you were not a wife," said the King, "and if I could only get rid of Margaret, who knows what might ensue? Perhaps I should be tempted—"

"Ah!" murmuringly ejaculated the Countess, with a sudden but slight start: "do you mean—do you mean—"

"Oh, it is useless to express what I mean!" exclaimed the King, starting up from his seat. "For you are married, Louisa—and I am married—and if in the wild dreams of imagination I therefore dared entertain any such idea, there are two barriers to be overleapt."

"Two barriers!" murmured the Countess, on whose cheeks the colour was coming and going in rapid transitions, while her bosom was heaving and falling in corresponding agitation.

"But it is foolish, I say," ejaculated David, filling a goblet to the brim and then raising it to his lips. "There seems to be fever in my veins," he continued, when he had quaffed the wine; "and that draught has cooled it. Ah! the idea was for the moment a pleasing one, though far fetched and impossible. Yet much better thou, Louisa, to be Queen of Scotland—thou who hast never offended me—thou who hast ever met me with smiles of love and gaiety and tenderness—"

"Yes, yes, sire!—oh, yes!" murmured the Countess, half rising from her seat to throw herself into the Monarch's arms; "ever loved have you been by me!"

"Well, well, Louisa!" ejaculated the King; "it cannot be helped—but another, though undeserving, has reaped the reward which thou didst most deserve! Let us change the topic. Tell me, by the bye, have you ever heard of your brother—what name was it that he assumed?"

"Conrad Rossel," responded the Countess. "No—I have never heard of him since the moment we parted in the Vale of Leven three years ago, when he brought me the intelligence that I was pardoned and was free, and when he overwhelmed me with an amount of advice which was doubtless very excellent, but which I did not especially care to follow. And now let me be a questioner in my turn. How fares it with Maude, the damsel who so perfidiously abandoned my service?"

"Ah! Maude," said the King, "has ever remained well in the good graces of Margaret, and is high in her favour."

"And that traitorous servitor of your's, sire," said the Countess, inquiringly,—"the one who substituted a real priest for a sham one?"

"Ah, Stephen Cochrane!" exclaimed David. "By St. Andrew! the fellow is the most skillful villain that ever dealt in knaveries and rascalities of a low and tricky kind! That last exploit of his—"

"Do you mean, sire," asked Louisa, "that exploit of making Margaret your wife when you thought that she was only becoming your mistress?"

"No, no," rejoined the King: "it was an exploit of a somewhat later occurrence. I will tell you the story; for 'tis one of those amusing rascalities at which one must needs laugh. There were certain French noblemen who were in London negotiating with Edward at the time for the release of their own King; and they offered to advance on my account the sum of eighteen thousand marks for a particular purpose. It was Stephen Cochrane who secretly negotiated with them; but circumstances transpired which rendered it unnecessary for the sum to be advanced. Cochrane returned to Scotland, and appeared, as you are aware, against my cause and interests in the memorable proceedings at Dumbarton. Then the wily villain disappeared again. Some weeks afterwards I received a communication from one of those French noblemen,—a communication which astounded me! But I will be brief. Stephen Cochrane had returned to London; and availing himself of his former credentials, had obtained from the French noblemen the eighteen thousand marks on the representation that circumstances had undergone a change and that the moment was then favourable for the use of this sum. That was Stephen Cochrane's last exploit, so far as my knowledge of his proceedings is concerned; and I have never since heard of him. He will doubtless take very good care not to set his foot upon the Scottish soil; for by St. Andrew! if I caught the rogue, not Haman in ancient times hung higher than he of whom we speak should hang at this present day!—But enough of all these retrospections!" suddenly ejaculated the King: "let us think of the enjoyment of the moment! Summon your fair harpists, Louisa; and here, seated by your side, I will drink draughts of love from your eyes and of nectar from the goblet!"

The Countess bent the sweetest smile upon the King, and proceeded to execute the wishes which he had just expressed in reference to the harpists; so that within a very few minutes the Scottish Monarch was more than ever under the influence of the melting harmony of music, the soft witchery of a siren's languishing eyes, and the effects of delicious wine.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

THE reader will not have forgotten that there was a monastery adjoining the Castle of Dalkeith, and that with the ecclesiastical occupants of this religious institution King David stood upon the terms of an excellent understanding. Therefore his visit to the town of Dalkeith was ostensibly paid to the monastery, while it was in reality devoted to the castle: but under cover of the former gloss all scandal was avoided—or at least, whatsoever suspicions might have been engendered, were limited to a very narrow circle.

On the following morning the King was seated with the Countess of Morton at an elegant breakfast in one of the sumptuously renovated apartments of Dalkeith Castle; and we will look in upon them

at the moment when the conversation was taking a turn which will prove interesting to our readers.

"And so the Queen," said the Countess, "is still sojourning at Urquhart Castle?"

"Yes," responded David. "Margaret seems to love that residence better than any other. Perhaps you may have heard that for the first year or eighteen months after our marriage—or rather, I should say, after the proclamation of it at Dumbarton—Margaret took a fancy to parade all over the kingdom. A few weeks were passed at Edinburgh Castle, where she received the loyal addresses and congratulations of the burghers of her capital. Thence we repaired to Stirling—and the same ceremony was repeated. At Perth she received a complete ovation: but in Glasgow it was a veritable triumph. I will candidly confess that she bore her honours with a sufficient dignity. By St. Andrew! she played the Queen just for all the world as if she had been brought up from her very infancy to sit upon a throne, instead of having been all the while a proscribed scion of the house of Logie!"

"Ah, sire," said the Countess, "if I might be permitted, I would ask a question."

"Ask, my dear Louisa," interrupted David; "and rest assured that you shall have my response, if it can be given."

"I was thinking," continued the Countess, "that when you first learnt she belonged to the proscribed house of Logie, strange feelings must have fluttered in your heart; for if I mistake not, it was her ancestor Sir John who was the life and soul of the conspiracy against your royal father—the very one who pledged himself at the iniquitous meetings of the traitors to deal the death-blow to the great and good Robert Bruce!"

"Ah, by St. Andrew! there is no limit to them!" exclaimed David. "Though for several months past she has been residing in the somewhat secluded Castle of Urquhart in Inverness-shire, she has plunged into all species of gaieties—giving festivals of every description—banquets and balls—hunting-parties—"

"But your Majesty has been with her until the last few days?" interjected the Countess, who was now wilfully seeking to fathom the minutest particulars in respect to the footing on which the King and Queen stood towards each other.

"Yes—in good sooth I was there: but you know that it was only within the last few weeks that my resolve was taken to abandon the idea of war against England, and thus to dispense with the succour and services of the Teutonic Knights. It is only now, therefore, that I feel myself free to shake off the policy of dissimulation which I have maintained towards Queen Margaret, and to find breathing-time to think how I may curb her in her expenditure and cut her down in her extravagancies."

"I comprehend," said the Countess. "May I ask whether Prince de Salza frequently communicates with his royal relative, or *protégé*, or whatever she may be?"

"His Highness the Grand Master has occasionally written to Margaret; and each time he has sent her costly gifts. Ah, by the bye, I know not whether there was anything significant in the fact—but some six months ago, when he first learnt that she particularly affected the Castle of Urquhart and was furnishing it in sumptuous style, he sent her among other presents six pieces of that new species of missile which vomits fire and shot and of which we first heard at the battle of Creci, where King Edward of England defeated the French about twenty years ago. They are called cannon."

"I have not only heard of such fearful missiles," said the Countess; "but on a recent visit to London I beheld some specimens of that new invention."

"And now," continued David, "it is often Margaret's delight to have her ears deafened by the thunder of the ordnance from the walls of Urqu-

were bent deprecatingly upon my countenance; that I remained kneeling by her side: but it was more on account of something else that was passing in my mind!"

"And that something else—I now know it!" said Louisa. "It was the idea of wreaking the traditional vengeance whereof you have just spoken?"

"Yes—it was so," rejoined David. "And great that vengeance would have been if everything had passed as I fancied and expected at the time, and if that villain Cochrane had not deceived me."

"But after all," said the Countess, who in the williness and subtlety of her heart knew that by giving the conversation this turn she was fanning the worst and most sinister flames of hatred and bitterness in the King's soul—"but, after all, it was Margaret who was the winner—and you, sire, who were in every sense baffled and defeated."

"Do not speak of it, Louisa!" cried David petulantly. "I feel like a man who had sustained a thousand wrongs! Perhaps it was because the name of Logie grated so terribly on my nerves, that I made a more desperate fight than I otherwise should have done to baffle, to defeat, and to crush Margaret altogether."

"Is it possible, sire," asked Louisa, "that at a time when the royal treasury is brought to so low an ebb by the payment of the ransom-money, her Majesty Queen Margaret still pursues her extravagancies?"

"By St. Andrew! there is no limit to them!" exclaimed David. "Though for several months past she has been residing in the somewhat secluded Castle of Urquhart in Inverness-shire, she has plunged into all species of gaieties—giving festivals of every description—banquets and balls—hunting-parties—"

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"I have not only heard of such fearful missiles," said the Countess; "but on a recent visit to London I beheld some specimens of that new invention."

"And now," continued David, "it is often Margaret's delight to have her ears deafened by the thunder of the ordnance from the walls of Urqu-

hart Castle, to the enormous consuming of that most expensive ingredient denominated powder. But as I was observing, I marvel whether there were anything significant in the present thus bestowed by Prince de Salsa—and whether he purposed to enable Margaret thus to fortify for herself a position that should be impregnable in case of need?"

"No doubt, sire," responded the wily Countess, "everything is taken into calculation by those who know not how soon they may deem it expedient to act with a spirit that shall be hostile to the best interests of your Majesty. If I were you, sire——"

But here again the Countess stopped short, as if she were approaching delicate ground and feared that she might be going too far.

"Proceed, Louisa," said the King. "You know that I have every confidence in your judgment and I like to hear your opinion on all things. Speak without diffidence."

"If I were you, then, sire," continued the wily and unprincipled woman, "I would——But no! I scarcely dare suggest it!"

"Speak, I say!" exclaimed the King. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, sire—since you compel me to give utterance to my thoughts—and it is only in your interest that I can be induced to do so,—I mean, I say," she continued, "that if I were you, I would institute a watch on the proceedings of her Majesty: for now that you are about to despatch a messenger to Prince de Salsa with the announcement that the time is not favourable for proclaiming war against England, it may be expedient——"

"Ah, my dear Louisa!" ejaculated David, with a peculiarly significant smile; "you must not suppose that I have been all this time asleep! I have instituted a watch upon Margaret. She is constantly attended by one whom she deems faithful, but who is a spy upon all her actions. Yet it was not from political motives that I did this—nor because at the time I dreaded any traitorous machinations on her part."

"Then for what motive, sire?" asked Louisa.

"There is no denying that she is remarkably handsome," resumed David: "she is now in all the glory and splendour of an early and precocious womanhood—for, as you know, she is but just twenty-one years of age——"

"Yes, yes, sire—she is very handsome," interjected the Countess quickly; for she relished not these allusions to Queen Margaret's transcendent beauty.

"She is not only handsome—but she knows it," continued David. "She is fond of admiration; and though superior to the idle compliments of a mere sycophantic flattery, yet she loves full well to mark the effect produced by her charms; and the devoted gaze of courtly cavaliers gives her no offence. Sometimes the idea has struck me that it is possible," proceeded the King, now speaking hesitatingly,—"*possible*, I mean, that her vanity as a woman may constitute a weakness where the pride of a Queen would otherwise prove a tower of strength. In short," added David, "I have fancied that it is within the range of possibility she might be moved by the homage of one or another of her courtly worshippers."

"I comprehend, sire," said the Countess. "You think it possible that she might be led to forget her duties as a wife——"

"Ah! you women are strange creatures!" ejaculated David, with a smile: "and who knows what may happen when your sex is concerned? Every woman likes to be loved, and likes also to love. Now, Margaret knows that she is not loved by me

—neither does she love me. Am I to suppose that this is to be an exception to the rule—that she is exempt from the necessity of loving or from the desire of being loved? Well, then, if she be no exception, ought I not to know? And what is more," added the King, bending forward across the breakfast-table and speaking in a subdued tone, which was accompanied with a look of peculiar significance, "may I not, if the case *should* arise, take advantage of it?"

"Ah, true!" said the Countess, scarcely able to conceal the feverish fluttering of joyous hope which these revelations awakened in her heart: and then she mentally ejaculated, "He would divorce her if he could!"

"So you see," continued David, "as a requisite precaution—in a word, that I may know everything that passes—I have instituted a watch over her actions."

"A faithful and trustworthy spy?" exclaimed the Countess inquiringly.

"A faithful and trustworthy spy," responded David, repeating Louisa's words. "There are no secrets between you and me: I will tell you therefore who this spy is. It is a woman—a woman of energy, caution, and talent—with but little principle, as you may suppose—and therefore all the better suited for the purpose. In a word, this spy of mine is Lady Galbraith."

"Lady Galbraith?" said the Countess, gathering her recollections. "Methinks the name is not altogether unfamiliar—but yet I am at a loss——"

"She is the widow of Sir John Galbraith, who was the governor of the Castle of the Bass Rock."

"Ah, true!" ejaculated Louisa: "the castle where the Earl of Bassentyne was confined, and whence he escaped?"

"The same," rejoined David.

"And Sir John Galbraith is dead?" asked the Countess. "This is the first I had heard of the event."

"It seems that the poor man took so to heart the Earl's escape—to him so unaccountable and mysterious—that it brought on a fit of apoplexy, and he died a few days afterwards."

"And how was that escape effected?" inquired the Countess.

"Ah, that I do not know!" rejoined David.

"The Earl of Bassentyne left Scotland suddenly, immediately after the adventures at Dumbarton: he preferred no plaint in reference to his captivity—and thus the secret of his escape remained locked up in his own breast. Some few months after Sir John Galbraith's death, his widow appealed to me, representing that she and her daughter—a comely dame! by the bye—stood the chance of being plunged into distress; and as I was at the very time looking out for some trustworthy person to enact the part of spy over the Queen, it occurred to me, for more reasons than one, that Lady Galbraith would answer this purpose. To be brief, we soon came to an understanding; and our plans were taken accordingly. I recommended her to apply to the Queen as if it were the first application of the kind she had made, and in no way as if it were the result of any secret prompting on my part. That application was successful—Margaret at once appointed Lady Galbraith and her daughter Marion to situations about her own person."

"And what has become of the Earl of Bassentyne?" asked the Countess of Morton.

"I understand that he returned to Scotland a few weeks ago," responded David; "but he has not appeared at Court—he has buried himself in the seclusion of his own castle, which, as you are aware, is at no great distance hence."

"And did you not tell me, sire, last night," asked the Countess, "that at one time there were certain love-passages betwixt the Earl and the Queen while she was yet plain Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan?"

"Yes," answered David: "and it was for that very reason I caused him to be plunged into captivity at the time. Lady Galbraith hates him—no doubt because he escaped, and by that escape produced the death of her husband."

"Ah! ha!" said the Countess with an arch smile; "now I begin to have a better understanding of the present topics of our discourse. I penetrate your Majesty's calculations! If perchance the Earl of Bassentyne, who is handsome and chivalrous, should present himself to the Queen—and if there *should* be any revival of their former feelings of attachment—Lady Galbraith would affect to wink at any little secret meeting or exchange of amatory billets; but all the while she would be faithfully reporting to your Highness the delicate and occult proceedings. Is it not so?"

"Your conjectures are right, Louisa," answered David, with a smile as sly as her own was a few moments previously. "When I thought of selecting Lady Galbraith for the office of spy upwards of two years ago, I confess that the Earl of Bassentyne was running in my head; and hearing how bitterly she inveighed against him, I naturally thought that her ladyship was the most proper person to undertake the office whereunto we are alluding. I did not then foresee that Roland of Bassentyne would remain absent so long——"

"But now he is returned!" exclaimed the Countess, eagerly; "and——"

"And perhaps there is a chance," added David, "of accomplishing what I desire. Why should I dissemble with you, Louisa? No! I will not! Let me then confess that it would gladden me to have an opportunity of divorcing that woman who became my wife by a trick, and whom I doubly hate for the reason that she is a descendant of the murderous traitor Sir John Logie!"

The Countess of Morton almost started with joy as she listened to this revelation of the King's secret thoughts and witnessed this complete throwing off the mask. But she restrained herself, and for a few minutes remained silent, as if it were a topic on which she dared not venture an opinion, much less express a hope.

"But if it be necessary that the Queen should be watched," said Louisa, at length breaking silence, "would it not be better to have more than *one* spy? One pair of eyes cannot be always open—one pair of ears cannot be ever listening——"

"True!" said David, in a musing manner: and then he added, "But the difficulty is to find another devoted and trustworthy person."

"No difficulty!" ejaculated the Countess. "I have one ready at hand—one whom I will warrant to be a thousand times more keen-witted than your Lady Galbraith or any other woman about the Queen!"

"Ah! indeed?" said the King. "And who may be this marvel of keenness and vigilance?"

"He whom I sent to your Majesty at Edinburgh Castle," was the response.

"What!" exclaimed David, bursting out into a hearty laugh; "that prince of ugliness! that paragon of all deformities! that living embodiment of all nature's most eccentric freaks!"

"The same," rejoined Louisa seriously and gravely. "I can rely upon him as I can upon my own self!"

David left off laughing, and reflected for a few moments. He then said, "But what do you propose? If I take him into my service and leave him

at Urquhart Castle, the Queen may possibly suspect something—or at least she may revolt at the idea of having such a monster constantly crossing her path."

"But it is into the Queen's service that I mean Mompesson to enter!" interjected the Countess.

"The Queen's?" exclaimed the King in surprise.

"Yes—into the Queen's service! But leave it to me, sire," urged Louisa. "I will undertake the business—and I am confident of success. Stay! I will summon Mompesson; and in your presence——"

"No, no, I thank you!" exclaimed David. "I am not so fond of the wretched abortion's looks——"

"Well, well," interrupted the Countess, who had her own reasons for not pressing this point of the matter; "I will tutor him alone. And that no time may be lost, I will despatch him on his enterprise within the hour that is passing."

Thus speaking, the Countess rose from the table and quitted the room; and as the door closed behind her, the King murmured to himself, "By St. Andrew! Louisa is devoted to me; and in whatsoever she undertakes, she does not suffer the grass to grow under her feet!"

But if we follow the Countess into another apartment, to which she beckoned the hideous dwarf, who was waiting in an ante-chamber, we shall see why it was that she did not persist in issuing her instructions in the King's presence—and why, on the contrary, she had the best possible reasons for wishing to be thus closeted alone with Mompesson.

CHAPTER LXX.

MOMPESSEON.

THE Countess of Morton took a seat, and the dwarf placed himself at a short distance—sufficiently remote for the respect due from a menial to a mistress, and yet sufficiently near to catch whatsoever might fall from her ladyship's lips.

"I wish to have a little conversation with you, worthy Mompesson," said the Countess.

"I am always pleased," answered the wretched specimen of ugliness, "when the music of your ladyship's voice flows upon my ear; for it is ever in kind language that the Countess of Morton addresses her unfortunate servitor."

"I think," said Louisa, "that you have no reason to complain of my bearing and demeanour towards you ever since you have been in my service?"

"I owe your ladyship a debt of gratitude which never can be repaid!" rejoined Mompesson. "You know with what alacrity I ever execute your orders!—you know with what a yearning anxiety I endeavour to anticipate your wishes!—and Oh, lady! it is because I feel so deeply all that you have done for me!"

"Then you do really enjoy more happiness in my service," said Louisa, "than when you were in the household of Sir Roderick Conroy of Carlisle?"

The dwarf started; and his countenance, already ugly enough, became most hideously revolting with the expression of diabolical hate which settled itself upon his features, as he exclaimed, "Sir Roderick Conroy?—out upon the cruel Knight! For the many years I was in his service it was one continuous series of insults to which I was exposed!—one long agony which I endured! Buffeted and kicked by my master as well as by my fellow-servants—receiving my meals not as a Christian being, but as a dog that has offal tossed to him—the subject of bitter gibe and cruel taunt—Oh! I



was ever writhing under a sense of demoniac cruelty!—and how I for so many years passed through the dread ordeal, I know not. How oft my hand grasped the dagger in my belt, and yet dared not pluck it forth—for I knew that those who treated me with such vile heartlessness when I was doing no wrong, would render me the victim of the most horrible tortures if I dared make the slightest attempt to avenge their insults. Yes, lady! such was the accursed existence which I led in the household of the ruthless English Knight; and it was a blessed day for me on which I rendered your ladyship the slight service that attracted your kind notice—

"The service was far from a slight one, Mompesson," interrupted the Countess of Morton; "for inasmuch as I was urging my careering steed direct towards the precipice, unconscious of the fearful danger towards which I was thus approaching, it was nothing less than the salvation of my life when you sprang forward and so opportunely caught the bridle of my mettled courser."

"And if, lady, I saved your life once," responded the dwarf, "I would lay down my own a thousand times, were it possible, to prove all the gratitude I experience towards you, my noble patroness!"

"I took compassion upon you," said Louisa, "the instant I began questioning you on that memorable day whereof I am speaking and on which you saved me from falling over the precipice. You were unhappy in the service of a bad master—I bade you leave him and come into my household; and I am pleased to hear you declare that you have not regretted the change."

"Oh, regretted, lady?" ejaculated the dwarf. "As well regret that the glorious sun succeeds the hideous darkness of night—or that the eyes of angels look kindness upon one who has just escaped from the grasp of demons! But tell me, lady—why are you thus addressing me? Is it to assure yourself that I am really grateful? Oh, you know it! How could it be otherwise? The years that I have passed in your service have been a paradise in contrast with the pandemonium of my former misery. It is not now, 'Go and do this, vile lump of ugliness!'—or 'Speed thither, thou devil's imp!'—but it is 'Good Mompesson;' or 'Worthy dwarf;' or some other phrase kindly spoken. And it is because your ladyship set the example, which, even more effective than the mandates you proclaimed, secured me all this generous treatment in your service. But again I ask, why is your ladyship now addressing me so seriously upon the subject?"

"Those who are most grateful, worthy Mompesson," responded the Countess, "are always the most trustworthy."

"Ah, then your ladyship has need of my services," ejaculated the dwarf, "for some purposes more confidential and more important than any in which I have yet been engaged? I am glad of it! I only hope that the business with which you may entrust me shall be fraught with all possible difficulty, that I may show my tact in surmounting obstacles!—and with all possible peril, that I may demonstrate my indifference for danger when engaged on your ladyship's behalf!"

"All this is saying a great deal, my worthy Mompesson," observed the Countess; "but still it is not saying near enough. You may be prepared to trample down all obstacles; but you must likewise be prepared to trample all the best feelings of your nature under foot."

"Did I possess father, mother, brothers, or sisters," replied the dwarf, "I would ignore them all at your bidding, or if I could thereby advance your interests."

"And yet even that is not all which I may re-

quire at your hands," continued the Countess of Morton,—"I mean that the trampling under your feet of all the best feelings of your heart, is not near sufficient!"

"Ah, lady!" exclaimed the dwarf, "hear me when I declare that I am ready to proceed to any extent of villainy, iniquity, and crime—if need be—in order to prove all the devotion which I experience towards you, my noble and generous mistress!"

"Ah!" said the Countess, with a strong inward exultation, "I knew that I could thus rely upon you! My position—or rather I should say, my prospects—"

"Tell me nothing more than you think fit, lady!" interrupted the dwarf; "deign not to assign reasons for any course which you are anxious to take and wherein my services may be rendered available. I would rather obey you blindly than on any other terms—because such conduct on my part will prove my devotion all the more completely, and will supersede the possibility of imputing to me selfish or interested motives."

"Ah! but believe me, Mompesson," said the Countess, "if you serve me well and faithfully in these matters wherunto I am alluding, your reward shall be great!"

"Ah, lady!" ejaculated the dwarf, with an expression of vexation upon his countenance; "it is this very assurance which I did not wish to issue from your lips. And that is why I was anxious that you should not explain your own position more than might be necessary, for fear lest it should seem to hold out promises to me as an inducement for the exercise of all the zeal and daring, the ingenuity and the flattery whereof I may be capable. I would sooner, lady, obey you blindly—so that gratitude may be unmistakably shown to be my only motive! In a word, issue your mandates, and I hasten to fulfil them."

"You are well acquainted with Scotland, Mompesson?" said the Countess.

"Yes, lady," replied the dwarf; "for though owning a Southron parentage, yet was I for fifteen or sixteen years of the earliest portion of my life the attendant upon a wandering packman or pedlar through the Scottish shires. Afterwards, when I entered the service of Sir Roderick Conroy—to become the object of his own cruel jests and the butt of his household's heartless taunts and mockeries—I on several occasions rode in his train across the Border—"

"Enough, good Mompesson!" said the Countess: "I bear in mind enough of all you have told me at different times to feel convinced that there are few even of Caledonia's sons who are better acquainted with all the by-ways, defiles, and passes of Scotland, than yourself. Now, the service which I seek of you is twofold. The first portion is that you by some means or another procure admission into the service of Queen Margaret—"

"And leave yours, lady?" ejaculated the dwarf, his hideous countenance now expressing an air of the deepest concern.

"Only for a time," answered the Countess; "and that period will be the longer or the shorter according to the success which may attend the object I have in view when desiring that you should obtain a post about the person of the Queen. That is the first portion of the service I am about to demand of you—or indeed, I ought more correctly to specify that it is one distinct task which I assign you. But the other—and here the voice and look of the Countess altered as if into an expression of more mysterious confidence—"is of a gravity and a seriousness—perhaps even stronger terms might be used—"

"Speak, lady," said Mompesson; "I am not waiting to measure your words nor to judge of your motives, but to see how I may most zealously and faithfully obey your ladyship's bidding."

Louisa reflected for a few moments; and then she added, "How many miles is it from hence to Urquhart Castle on the bank of Loch Ness in Inverness-shire?"

Mompesson calculated for a very brief space; and then he said, "Proceeding from Dalkeith to Linlithgow and Stirling, and thus avoiding the Ferries, the distance, may it please your ladyship, is about a hundred and twenty miles."

"And now tell me," said the Countess, "what is the distance from Urquhart Castle to Carlisle?"

"The distance from Urquhart Castle to Carlisle, in a direct line," responded Mompesson, "is about a hundred and seventy miles."

"I am now about to ask a question," said the Countess, "which is of the utmost importance. Weigh it well before you answer it; for you will soon learn how much depends upon a correct estimation in this respect."

"Proceed, lady," said Mompesson: "I will answer you to the best of my ability—and at all events you are assured that I shall answer you conscientiously."

"This then is the question," resumed the Countess of Morton. "Suppose you were at Urquhart Castle, and that a matter of life and death depended upon the speed with which you journeyed from thence to Carlisle, and retraced your way to the spot whence you set out—allowing some two or three hours at Carlisle for the particular business which was taking you thither—how long would you be?"

"That is to say, my lady," remarked Mompesson, "you wish to know in how brief a space of time I could accomplish a distance of three hundred and forty miles, and tarry three hours in the midst of the entire journey? But before I answer this question, your ladyship must reply to a query which I have to put. Do you mean me to make use of the same horse for the entire journey?—or to procure a change of steeds as often as possible and lavish money so as to accelerate my pace to the utmost?"

The Countess reflected for a few moments; and then she slowly shook her head, murmuring to herself, "The latter process would be attended with too much publicity—suspicions might be excited—questions might be subsequently asked! No!—it cannot be managed thus!"—then turning her regards upon the dwarf, she said, "This double journey of which I speak—this journey from the district of Loch Ness to Carlisle, and from Carlisle back to Loch Ness—must be accomplished under all possible circumstances of secrecy. It is for this reason that I just now spoke to you, my worthy Mompesson, of your knowledge of mountain-passes and pathways through defiles—of all the hidden, secluded, and lonely roads, in short, which you can take for the purpose of enveloping your proceedings in the deepest mystery."

"I understand, lady," exclaimed the dwarf; "and therefore the double journey, to Carlisle and back to the starting-point, is not to be accomplished with post horses nor relays, nor by continuous riding along the main routes—but through glens and forests, beneath the shade of towering mountains, and always upon the back of the same animal. Three hundred and forty miles, lady!" added Mompesson, in a musing strain. "Heaven knows that I myself require no rest, and that there are no earthly fatigues I would not encounter for your sake!—aye, with the conviction, too, of sustaining them! But the steed itself must enjoy occasional intervals for refreshment and for rest. Therefore, all things considered—and especially bearing in mind the

unfavourable nature of the paths which I should have to pursue—it were impossible to accomplish the task under a period of eight days."

"Eight days?" said the Countess. "It is a long time!"

"If I found it possible, my lady, to achieve the distance in less time," rejoined Mompesson, "rest assured that there should be no lack of good-will on my part. But I do not wish to mislead you; and therefore I have made my computation in a cautious and careful manner, with due allowance for all contingencies."

"Then so it must be!" said the Countess: "and I must furthermore trust to your ingenuity when at Urquhart Castle, to account for the lapse of those eight days in your existence!—yes, to account for them, I repeat, in such a manner that not the faintest breath of suspicion may fall upon you—but that those persons to whom you will have to address yourself, may believe as firmly and as confidently as if throughout those eight days their eyes had never been off you—so that if any accuser should stand forward to proclaim that in the interval you had visited Carlisle, a dozen witnesses might be ready to corroborate your declaration that you had never been absent the while for a single day—no, nor scarcely for an hour—from the margin of Loch Ness in far-off Inverness-shire!"

"Trust to me, lady," answered the dwarf, "to regulate matters according to expediency. He is not a man of tact who trusts to chance for the combination of circumstances in a manner favourable to his plans and designs: but the true man of tact is he who gives to circumstances themselves the form, shape, and impress which may suit his own views. Any dullard can float with the stream: but wisdom, astuteness, and cunning are shown in making the stream flow in the direction required."

Mompesson had never before spoken in terms so replete with a lofty self-reliance and a consciousness of strong mental power, without the slightest tincture of bravado or conceit. The Countess knew that he was clever and quick-witted as well as resolute and persevering; but she was not prepared to hear him philosophise, as it were, in a vein of perfect heroism. Her heart consequently became all the more elate, her spirits all the more exultant, and her hopes all the more sanguine; so that in the joyous confidence which she now reposed in that hideous specimen of humanity, she extended towards him her hand, which, on his knees, he hastened to carry to his lips.

"But I have yet more to say, my worthy Mompesson," she continued, as she motioned him to rise from his suppliant posture. "I have told you that there is a long journey for you to undertake under peculiar circumstances: but I have not as yet explained to you wherefore you are to pay that visit of some few hours at Carlisle,—a visit that is to be veiled in a mystery as deep as the journey itself! Come nearer, my worthy friend; for such indeed will you prove to me! Come nearer, I say—and let me whisper a few words in your hearing!—words of the gravest and most serious import! for the very walls have ears for such words as those which are about to flow from my lips!"

The dwarf accordingly drew nearer; and the Countess of Morton spoke something. It was something brief, but terse and emphatic; and in spite of himself Mompesson started visibly. For an instant too—but only for an instant—he bent a look of surprise and uncertainty on the Countess, as if he thought that she was perhaps putting him to some test unaccountably severe. He however beheld naught in the sombre resoluteness of her countenance to make him suppose that he had either

insunder tood her; or that she was in some mysterious sense experimentalising with his feelings: he therefore assumed a determination of look which was akin to her own—and said in a firm emphatic voice, “I will do it.”

For about ten minutes longer the Countess of Morton and the dwarf discussed the twofold subject—or rather, the two distinct matters to which we have alluded; and when a complete understanding existed between them, Louisa furnished Mompesson with a heavy purse of gold. He then descended to the stables to prepare his steed for an immediate departure; while the Countess returned to the room where she had left the King.

“Well, Louisa,” asked the Monarch, “have you completed your arrangements with that little personification of all possible ideas of ugliness?”

“Yes, sire,” responded the Countess: “he is about to start on the mission which I have confided to him; and for some weeks or months to come he will be heard of only, I hope, in the vicinity of your Grace’s royal consort, Queen Margaret.”

“So much the better!” responded David,—“provided that all these manœuvres be crowned with success. I shall now repair to Edinburgh, and thence will I despatch an envoy to Prince de Salas, with the intimation that I am not now prepared to make war against England. But this evening, my dear Louisa,—this evening,” repeated the King, surveying the Countess with a tender significance, “I shall return to Dalkeith, to banquet in your sweet company, and to listen to the delicious strains of your fair harpists.”

“Oh, how welcome will you be, sire!” exclaimed the Countess, in a tone of enthusiasm. “But Ah! one word, which I had nearly forgotten to speak! I did not tell Mompesson that there is already a spy upon the Queen’s actions; and it were perhaps as well if your Majesty were to be equally well guarded in respect to Lady Galbraith.”

“Oh, rest assured that I shall be so!” responded David; “for if she knew that I was appointing another to a similar office, she is just as likely to conceive some jealous fantasy and to turn right round upon me and espouse the cause of Margaret.”

“Assuredly so,” answered Louisa, who had her own reasons for wishing Mompesson to act in total independence of any watch that might otherwise be instituted over his actions by Lady Galbraith.

The King took his departure; and as he rode forth from the gate of the adjoining monastery, the ambitious woman whom he had left behind in Dalkeith Castle, exultingly exclaimed in the seclusion of her exquisitely furnished chamber, “Yes—it is indeed probable that I shall wear a diadem and be Queen of Scotland!”

And as at the same time the hideous dwarf Mompesson—looking like a horrible baboon with a lion’s head, as he was mounted upon a well-formed powerful steed—was pursuing his way in a north-westerly direction, he muttered to himself, “Ah! she thinks I am doing it all for gratitude!—but she is mistaken! In serving her, I can serve myself! There is enough in these schemes of her’s to make the fortunes of twenty reckless adventurers;—and surely, therefore, sufficient to place me in the happiest independence? Ah! how well I wormed everything out of her!—how skilfully I played my part! Those who seek to fathom the very profundity or secrets, must seem indifferent even to the aspect of the surface! Blind obedience indeed! Ah! but not so blind but that I have kept an eye open to my own peculiar interests! Mompesson, my friend,” continued the horrible abortion, thus apostrophising himself; “fortune bestowed on thee nought but buffets for the greater portion of thy

life:—let us now see whether she be not inclined to shower down upon thine head an equal quantity of bounties!”

CHAPTER LXXI.

CASTLE URQUHART.

THE county of Inverness boasts of a grand piece of inland water bearing the name of Loch Ness. It is situated in the midst of some of the most picturesque portions of Highland scenery; and along its banks nature presents the varying characters of the sublime, the wild, and the beautiful. On the north-eastern shore of this lake stands a very high rock, on the summit of which Castle Urquhart reared its huge square donjon, with the annexed buildings protected by massive flanking towers, and the whole surrounded by several parallel walls of defence. There was but one entrance into the fortalice; and this was by a somewhat steep ascending path up a fissure, or rather indentation, on the south-western side of the rock. In all other parts the castellated edifice was considered to be as nearly inaccessible as possible,—at all events accessible only to some intrepid climber, who for amusement’s sake, or in pursuit of game, might clamber the escarped walls of rock,—but certainly inaccessible in cases of siege. Queen Margaret had rendered it a royal fortress; the standard of Scotland floated upon one of the corner turrets of the huge massive donjon; and the six pieces of ordnance, which the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights had presented to his niece, bristled amidst the battlements on the north-eastern wall of the fortalice.

On the land-side of the rock,—or, in other words, behind the rock itself—is Glen Urquhart, one of the most beautiful of all the Highland valleys—covered with verdure in the summer-time, and picturesque even in the winter. It was dotted with smiling cottages at the far back period of which we are writing; but at the present day it presents numbers of gentlemen’s seats to the view. And as if this modern period should be made to stand out in still stronger contrast with the bygone age unto which our story pertains, the feudal fortalice which belonged to those remote centuries has now fallen into decay; while the lighter edifices of modern civilization seem to smile, amidst their parks and enclosed domains, at the remnants of the granite giant on his solid pedestal of rock.

But at the period of which we are writing, Castle Urquhart was in its glory, and was rendered by a beautiful, a brilliant, and an extravagant Queen an epitome of the state of civilization in that age. Its apartments were sumptuously furnished; and as yet it was the only fortalice in Scotland possessing specimens of that terrible invention which was destined so completely to change the nature of warfare—we mean the cannon that pointed their muzzles over the rampart. As for the edifice itself,—though the windows were small, narrow, and heavy in their construction, yet were they embellished by the richest draperies that the looms of Flanders could supply. French silks and damasks festooned to the canopies of Utrecht velvet which surmounted the massive bedsteads, and though in most of the rooms there were either bare boards, or else rushes spread upon them, yet in Margaret’s own suite of apartments there were rich carpets upon the floors. The walls were hung with elegantly-wrought tapestries; and an endless variety of ornaments were scattered about. It required but a single glance to convince a beholder that he was not merely in the abode of royalty, but that likewise

the presiding genius was of the feminine sex—and that the taste of this genius was not limited in its gratification by any regard for expense. Indeed, Margaret, on assuming the queenly diadem, was resolved that she would play the part of a Queen to the very utmost, according to those royal notions which have ever had lavish profusion, parade, glitter, show, and ostentation, as well as pampered luxury, for their associations.

It was about a week after the incidents detailed in the preceding chapter—in the afternoon of a beautiful day towards the middle of July—when the thunder of the six pieces of ordnance on the rampart of Urquhart Castle denoted that Queen Margaret was about to set forth on a riding excursion with the principal nobles and ladies of her Court. The royal *cortège* was about thirty in number, the male and female portions being pretty equally balanced; and a brilliant cavalcade was presented to the view. The Queen was sumptuously apparelled,—her riding-dress being fringed and embroidered with gold, and the caparisons of her palfrey indicating that no cost had been spared upon their embellishment. The King had correctly spoken, when in discourse with Lady Morton he had represented Margaret as being now in the glory of her beauty; for it would be impossible to conceive a being more grandly handsome—more imposing, or more majestic as a Queen, or more elegant as a lady. Her figure, somewhat fuller than when we first introduced her to our readers three years previous to the present date of which we are writing, preserved all its admirable symmetry and justness of proportions; and she sat upon her steed with the graceful ease of an accomplished horsewoman. No children had issued from her union with David; and thus all the first freshness of youth seemed to be perfectly unmarred and unimpaired, though blended with that superb development of her charms.

On the Queen's right hand rode Lady Galbraith—a remarkably handsome woman of about three-and-forty, but who at a distance looked much younger—though at a nearer view there might be discerned on her countenance those slight lines, scarcely yet deepening into wrinkles, which to some had the appearance of the traces of a widow's cares, but which to the more keen observer would reveal themselves as the evidences of strong passions which were otherwise concealed by the gloss of studied smiles and the constant mask of dissimulation. On Margaret's left hand rode the Lord Chamberlain of her household—a scyophantic peer of middle age, whose only desire was to pay the most assiduous court to his young and brilliant Queen. The rest of the nobles and ladies followed in due order, according to their respective ranks: but amongst the ladies was one whom a superb beauty rendered eminently conspicuous, and whose years numbered about two-and-twenty. This was Marion Galbraith. Amongst the minor dependants, who brought up the rear, was the faithful Maudie—senior *trewoman*, or “confidential handmaid,” as she was termed, of her Majesty Queen Margaret.

Before following this brilliant cavalcade on its present excursion, we must incidentally mention two or three little particulars. Margaret had never been made acquainted with the circumstances of the Earl of Bassentyne's escape from the Castle of the Bass Rock; she only knew that he had been imprisoned there at the time of her private marriage with the King, and that he *did* escape by some means or another. She failed not to conjecture at whose instigation he had been immured in a dungeon at that special time; and she had also fathomed the magnanimous forbearance which after his release pre-

vented him from formally bringing forward his plaint (as in the oratory at Dalkeith he had threatened to do) during the memorable proceedings at Dumbarton Castle. But, as we have said, she was ignorant how he had escaped from the fortalice of the Bass Rock; her brother Fleming had never enlightened her on the point—for, be it recollected, he was bound to secrecy thereon by his friend Roland of Bassentyne. Thus, when upwards of two years previous to the date of which we are now writing, Lady Galbraith had applied to Margaret for some post or succour to save her from distress, the Queen at once acceded to the requisition. In the first place Margaret was by no means bad-hearted in all matters where her own selfish interests were not concerned; and she was moved by the representations, partly real and partly artificial, of the appealing widow. Secondly, when Marion was presented to her, she conceived a liking for that young lady; and thirdly, she experienced a sympathy for those who had suffered in consequence of the death of one who died of grief on account of the escape of the Earl of Bassentyne; for she naturally thought to herself that it must have been through the kindness of Sir John towards his prisoner that the discipline of a strict vigilance was so far relaxed as to afford the facility for this escape. Thus, under all circumstances, she had cheerfully taken Lady Galbraith and Marion into her household—little suspecting that the application on the part of the designing widow was secretly instigated by the King. Equally remote was she from imagining that Lady Galbraith was a spy upon her actions; while the beautiful and amiable Marion herself was precisely in the same state of unconsciousness of the ignoble, treacherous, and ungrateful part that her mother was performing about Margaret's person.

Having given these few necessary details, we will follow the brilliant cavalcade in its excursion through the beautiful valley which receded from the back of the rock whereon Urquhart Castle frowned above the placid waters of Loch Ness. We have already said that Margaret was well skilled in equestrian exercises: and after having walked her beautiful palfrey for some little distance, she gave the signal for proceeding at a smart pace along the beaten road which wound its way through the bottom of the glen. When the steeds were reined in again, the conversation which had been interrupted by the gallop, was resumed.

“Amongst the despatches which arrived at the Castle this morning,” said the Queen to Lady Galbraith, “there were letters for your ladyship. Did they convey no news beyond those tidings which we have already been so elaborately discussing?”

“They brought no particular intelligence, may it please your Highness,” answered Lady Galbraith. “They were from friends of mine in Edinburgh. They communicated the fact which this morning was likewise conveyed to your Majesty,—that our gracious King has determined, by the advice of his Council, upon abandoning, at least for the present, all idea of hostilities against England—and that messengers had been despatched to his Highness Prince de Salsa, announcing the royal decision. I do not think that your Grace pronounced an opinion upon the subject; and as every sentiment which your Highness may entertain on important public events, is naturally of interest—I might also say of consequence to those who have the supreme honour of attending on your Majesty—I must confess that I waited with some little anxiety for the enunciation of your royal opinion.”

Lady Galbraith watched the Queen's countenance

with furtive intentness as she thus spoke; but Margaret—though ignorant that the lady had any sinister motive for striving to elicit her opinion—was completely on her guard, and betrayed nothing by her looks. She had already made up her mind not to take any part which should be in opposition to her husband: she was resolved to avoid giving him any cause of complaint in the sphere of politics; and all the more so, inasmuch as he appeared to be supported by the Royal Council in the decision to which he had just come. Therefore, whatsoever the Queen privately thought or felt on the question, she was determined to keep her own counsel; and her features underwent not the slightest change, as she said, “Those who surround me, must on all topics of national policy take the cue for their opinions from the King, when they are either unable or unwilling to form a judgment for themselves.”

“Cunning and evasive!” thought Lady Galbraith within herself: then after a few moments’ reflection, she said, “Ah, by the bye! there was a little piece of intelligence contained in one of the letters which I received this morning—not that it is of any particular interest to your Majesty—”

“To what do you allude?” inquired the Queen.

“It revived an unpleasant memory in my mind, your Highness,” answered Lady Galbraith,—“conjuring up vividly to my recollection the loss of my ever-lamented husband.”

“Ah, my dear friend!” said Margaret, “you know that I always sympathise deeply with you on this score! But what is this incident which has so vividly conjured up that sad event?”

“It was the mention, may it please your Highness, of the name of the Earl of Bassentyne.”—and here Lady Galbraith again furtively watched the countenance of Margaret.

This time the Queen was not so completely on her guard as in the former instance; for she never heard that name mentioned without a slight quail of conscience,—knowing how treacherously she had behaved to Roland and how magnanimous his demeanour had proved towards herself. A slight flush therefore passed over her countenance—or rather, we should say, there was a momentary deepening of the glow which the excitement of equestrian exercise had already conjured up to her cheeks: but instantaneously recovering her self-possession, she said, “And how was it the name of the Earl of Bassentyne found mention in the letters which your ladyship received this morning?”

“It appears that his lordship,” responded Lady Galbraith, “returned some three or four weeks back to Scotland: but he at once buried himself in the seclusion of his own castle—and it was only a few days ago that he made his appearance in Edinburgh for an hour or two.”

“Ah!” said the Queen, whose heart had palpitated with more or less violence for a few moments, though her countenance now continued perfectly calm; “then my noble friend, the Earl of Caithness, being on a visit to Hermitage Castle for the last month, doubtless continues ignorant of the Earl of Bassentyne’s return to Scotland: for if the Earl of Caithness were at this time sojourning at his own ancestral home of Roslin, he assuredly would not leave his young friend in such seclusion as that which according to your ladyship’s account he seems inclined to court.”

And again Margaret’s heart palpitated at the idea of this seclusion; for she could not help thinking it was in consequence of a lingering sentiment of love towards herself that the Earl of Bassentyne was thus shunning the world. She did not love him—she had never really cared for him: but as a woman she could not help feeling flattered by the

homage of that devotion which his conduct displayed towards herself: she likewise pitied him—and moreover there was that remorseful twinge of conscience which painfully reminded her of the treacherous treatment he had received at her hands. Lady Galbraith had not failed to notice that deepening of the healthful glow which ere now displayed the Queen’s sudden emotion; and she thought within herself, “Ah! she still thinks tenderly of Roland!”

She was about to make some remark, when the Lord Chamberlain suddenly ejaculated, “Ha! by St. Andrew! what have we here?”

All eyes were turned in the direction to which his lordship was looking; and other expressions of amazement burst forth, when at the mouth of a cave at a little distance, a most horrible unsightly dwarf was beheld seated on some fragments of a crag which there lay scattered about.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE DIVINING ROD.

INASMUCH as the reader has of course at once comprehended that this hideous-looking dwarf was none other than Mompesson, we need not enter upon a single syllable of personal description: but we may observe that he was dressed in a most fantastic style, and he held a long osier wand in his hand. His garments were parti-coloured—yellow, red, green, and blue: he wore a tall pointed cap, of a bright yellow colour, covered with mystic signs and hieroglyphics; and these were made of pieces of dark cloth cut into the particular shapes and stitched upon that yellow ground. His slippers were elongated to about a foot beyond their proper length, and terminated in points turning up somewhat in the fashion of modern skates. He looked profoundly serious when he was first observed seated upon the stone; but when the whole of that brilliant cavalcade halted as if with one assent, when the Queen drew in her bridle, the dwarf leapt down from the fragment of crag and made three profound reverences.

Margaret was too dignified to laugh outright at the ludicrous figure which Mompesson presented to her view; but she had certainly some difficulty in restraining the inclination to merriment which the spectacle excited—and a smile passed over her handsome countenance. Some of the attendant-ladies began to titter; but on finding that the Queen was not disposed to make a laughing-stock of the dwarf, they suddenly stopped their incipient mirthfulness. As for the Lord Chamberlain, he was quite ready to laugh or to look grave, to ridicule the dwarf or to treat him with distinction, precisely as he might receive his cue from the young and brilliant Queen.

“You salute us with courtesy, sir stranger,” said Margaret to Mompesson: “do you know to whom you have been paying this tribute of respect, and who it is that is now addressing you?”

“Yes—I know that I have the honour and the pleasure to stand in the presence of Scotland’s Queen,” answered the dwarf. “It was a desire which for some time I had entertained, and which is now fulfilled.”

“How know you that I am the Queen?” inquired Margaret, with a smile; “for by your words I should judge that this is the first time you have ever seen me.”

“The first time, may it please your Majesty,” rejoined Mompesson, with another low bow; “but it

needs none of my divining powers to make me aware that the brilliant leader of this most brilliant cavalcade can be none other than Scotland's Queen!"

"Well, sir stranger," answered Margaret, "we thank thee for thy courtesy. But who may you be? for perhaps you will not deem my speech rude if I declare that by your apparel you seem not to belong to the Scottish nation."

"No, gracious Highness—I belong not to the Scottish nation," responded Mompesson. "Vain were it for me to speak to your Majesty of the country of my birth; for your Highness knows it not."

"But might I ask wherefore you are a wanderer in Scotland?" inquired Margaret.

"I am a wanderer over many lands," returned the dwarf; "and there are few languages spoken in civilized climes with which I am not acquainted."

"This is some poor maniac," whispered Lady Galbraith to Margaret, "who doubtless fancies himself a very wise person, but who perhaps may not be so willing to suspect that he is a very ugly one."

"If he be really crazed and half-witted," responded Margaret, also speaking in a tone which was inaudible to the dwarf, "let us ascertain in which direction the course of his eccentricity flows; and if need be, we will place him under proper charge or restraint."

"Your Grace speaks well," observed the Lord Chamberlain, who was a listener to the discourse. "If the poor miserable wretch be harmless, he may continue his way in heaven's name!—but if he should seem to be fraught with an insanity at all dangerous towards others or threatening unto his own safety, the charitable intent of your Gracious Highness might be carried into effect."

"Worthy stranger," said the Queen, again addressing Mompesson, "if I mistake not, you are now spoke of your divining powers. Did you mean me to understand that you possessed a special gift in that sense, and that you are endowed with faculties which are not common amongst mortals?"

"Gracious Queen," answered Mompesson, with the utmost solemnity of look, so that there was actually something imposing in the gravity of his aspect, despite the horrible ugliness of his features,—"you must be too intelligent to speak slightly or scoffingly of whatsoever claim I might lay to the possession of gifts that are not commonly enjoyed by mortals. Nature is fair and impartial in the distribution of good and evil qualities amongst mankind. To some she assigns personal beauty—to others intellectual beauty—and so forth. Now, horribly treated by nature as I am in a physical sense, is it not rational to suppose the defect on the one hand is counterbalanced by some extraordinary bounty on the other hand? Or else what would prevent me from sinking down into the very vortex of despair?—or what would save me from serving as a living illustration of the injustice of heaven? But there is no such injustice!—and whatsoever amount of evil nature has inflicted upon me, according to the spectacle which I present to your view, is compensated by an amount of good the experience of which is a source of happiness unto myself."

"This is a jargon," whispered Lady Galbraith to the Queen, "which fully indicates the weak condition of the wretch's brain."

"On the contrary," replied Margaret, "methinks there is more or less of sound sense in the doctrine which he, as at least taught us, even though we should presently find that it emanates from the lips of a poor half-witted being. We will question him a little further."

"Assuredly, most gracious Majesty," said the Lord Chamberlain, "it will be well to question him a little further. Besides, it is a recreation and an amusement as well as anything else."

"Might I ask," said the Queen, now bending her fine dark eyes benignantly upon the dwarf, "what superior gift it is you possess and which causes you so much happiness?"

"It is no secret," replied Mompesson. "It is the gift of divination."

"Ah! the very power unto which you are now alluded?" said the Queen. "But in what sense—in what particular sphere—to what aim—I scarcely know how I would shape the question: but I will ask to what results do your powers of divination lead?"

"Meseems," remarked the Lord Chamberlain, "that it is a divining-rod which the stranger carries in his hand; and your gracious Majesty is of course aware that by the aid of these rods the gifted are enabled to discover where the purest springs of water exist in the earth below."

"True!" said the Queen: "I have heard of such powers of divination; but I can scarcely comprehend how the secret can prove of very great utility to this stranger-traveller—unless indeed he be accustomed to wander amidst the thirsty deserts of Araby. Here," continued the Queen, glancing around upon the beautiful scenery presented by Glen Urquhart to the view, "where the purest crystal streamlets are flowing in every direction and the pellucid springs are gushing from the side of every height, the divining rod can prove but of little utility."

Though this speech was addressed to the Lord Chamberlain in answer to the observations which he had previously made, yet Queen Margaret also meant her remarks to be overheard by Mompesson; and she accordingly spoke in a sufficient tone for the purpose.

"The divining-rod has no especial power in itself," said Mompesson: "it were idle to suppose that any preternatural virtue exists in an osier sapling which any one may pluck. The gift must be in the individual; and then the osier becomes the instrument with which the peculiar intelligence acts and the power develops itself. The warrior's prowess gives its effect to the sword which would otherwise hang inert by his side; and so it is that the mind of the peculiarly gifted makes use of the osier-wand as a means and an instrument. This same wand placed in the hand of an ordinary mortal, would be naught more than it really is—a simple twig plucked from the margin of the stream: but in the hand of the gifted it becomes like the wand of an enchanter! And there is more than one species of gift. There is the gift which enables the seer, by aid of the divining-rod, to point to where the purest waters flow in the earth beneath; and there is the gift which enables the seer to discern the spot where treasures of gold and silver are buried below."

"Ah, by St. Andrew!" ejaculated the Lord Chamberlain, "this were a profitable gift enough! May I ask, good sir, whether it be the special gift of divination wherewith you yourself are endowed?"

"The same," answered the dwarf, inclining his head with an air of meekness and deference.

"And by this gift of yours," inquired Margaret, "have you ever discovered where treasures are buried? or have you been hitherto living on in the hope of thus enriching yourself?"

"Ah, gracious Queen!" exclaimed Mompesson, assuming a look as if he were astonished at the question; "I know not what would have become of me or how I should have lived all this while, if it had not been for the occasional discovery of trea-

sure, more or less large in quantity, by aid of the divining-rod! But then," he went on to observe, with an air of the most perfect simplicity, "we human creatures have our sympathies: the beautiful sympathies with the beautiful—the ugly with the ugly—the intelligent with the intelligent—the fool with the simpleton. I form no exception to the rule. I have a special sphere for my own sympathies; and thus I travel over the world, relieving the distresses of those who are afflicted by ugliness, by deformity, or by any physical ailment—even as I myself am afflicted!"

"I understand you, good sir," responded Margaret, who grew more and more interested in the conversation, and who was less and less inclined to believe that the dwarf was a maniac—though on the other hand she was not altogether prepared to give her belief to the wonderful powers of his divining rod: "I understand you! Whatsoever riches may happen to come into your possession, you generously lavish them amongst those who appear to need such succour?"

"I take no merit to myself for such conduct, gracious lady," answered Mompesson meekly; "and I beg your Highness to observe that I am not parading these things of my own accord, but in answer to the leading questions which your Grace has put."

"True!" said the Queen. "But do you thus wander about the world alone? You ought to be rich, and you at least must have a sufficiency of golden coin at all times wherewith to purchase an adequate attendance?"

"Alas, gracious Queen!" replied Mompesson, "this is the first time that for years I have found myself alone! But journeying late last night, with a trusty dependant who had long been in my service, we essayed to cross a river which we deemed fordable; but Oh! the delusive waters!—the steed which my page bestrode was borne along by an irresistible current—and—and the last cry of his drowning agony was borne upon mine ear!"

"And thus you are alone, poor man!" said Margaret. "But might I ask whether you had any special motive for coming into this part of Scotland? Think you that there are treasures to be discovered here? or have you heard of unfortunates on whom you seek to bestow your charity?"

Mompesson looked very hard at the Queen for a few moments—then he bent down his head—then he raised his eyes again and flung a glance over the entire courtly company—thus most admirably simulating a hesitation and disinclination to reply to Margaret's queries.

"Nay, good sir," said the Queen, "if my demands were indiscreet, I would have you consider them the same as if they were still unspoken."

"Not so, gracious lady!" cried Mompesson, as if now abruptly repenting of a moment's churlish mistrustfulness. "You speak kindly—and I will speak candidly in return. By means of certain symptoms and indications on the part of the divining-rod, I have tracked my way hither, with the hope—nay, almost with the certainty that in this delightful vale I should discover a hidden treasure beneath the surface of the earth!"

"Ah, indeed!" ejaculated Margaret. "Can this be possible?" she asked, turning towards the Lord Chamberlain, and speaking in a low voice.

"It is quite possible, gracious Queen," responded that official: "I have heard of such things before—or at least tales replete with a similar degree of marvel—as your Grace must also have done?"

"And is it here, on this spot," inquired the Queen, abruptly turning towards Mompesson, "that you have halted at the instigation of your divining

rod?—is it here that you suppose the treasure to be buried? Ah! perhaps you suspect my motive?—but by heaven! I declare to you, on the word of a Queen, that I am perfectly incapable of taking, or suffering to be taken, a dishonest advantage of whatsoever you may tell me! In short, it is merely for the sake of gratifying a curiosity which I confess is now much excited."

"Doubtless your Majesty suspects the truth of my statements," answered Mompesson; "and this is natural enough. Of my own accord I would have told you nothing—because I should have expected to perceive the smile of incredulity upon your lips: but I have spoken because you have questioned me!"

"And I thank thee for thy frankness, sir stranger," rejoined Margaret. "Tell me, if it be possible for me in any way to reward your courtesy?"

"The way suggests itself, gracious Queen, after all the revelations I have made," replied Mompesson significantly.

"True!" exclaimed Margaret: "I understand! You shall have leave and license to do as you think fit on this spot—aye, or anywhere else throughout Glen Urquhart. Dig and delve—bore and mine, according to your own special mode of procedure; and as I am Scotland's Queen no one shall molest you nor unduly profit by your labours!"

"A thousand thanks, gracious Sovereign!" ejaculated Mompesson, sinking upon one knee and bowing his head thrice. "I shall avail myself of your Majesty's royal leave and license in respect to this particular spot: for now may I frankly confess that it is *there*"—and he pointed towards the interior of the cave—"that the treasure lies buried. Behold!"

With this ejaculation Mompesson sprang up from his kneeling posture, and rushed into the cave. The mouth of it was about six feet high and four feet broad: and it maintained these dimensions for at least half-a-dozen yards inside ere it began to grow narrower. Thus it was in the middle of a decent-sized room, or cell so to speak, that the dwarf now stood, while the flood of sunlight poured sufficiently far into the cavern to reveal him completely to the view of the brilliant cavalcade that was now forming a semicircle about the entrance of that cavern.

"What on earth is he about to do?" ejaculated the stately Lady Galbraith, who was piqued at Margaret's attention having been turned aside from the topics on which they had been discoursing before the hideous-looking dwarf suddenly broke upon their view.

"Methinks," said the Lord Chamberlain, "that he is about to prove to us the qualities of his divining-rod."

"Hush! What says he?" cried the Queen.

"May I request that your Majesty's courtly train will keep silent for a few minutes?" asked Mompesson from within the cave; "so that nothing may divert my thoughts from the channel in which they should now exclusively flow."

"Silence it shall be, sir stranger!" ejaculated the Queen.

The whispers which were wavering upon many a lip in that courtly train were suddenly hushed; and all eyes were riveted upon the dwarf. He held the wand in the middle in a peculiar way with the thumb, the forefinger, and the middle finger of his right hand; and for nearly a minute he made it spin round over his head with such exceeding velocity that it looked like a wheel which was thus whirling in a manner that actually produced a sensation of dizziness on the part of the beholders. But



gradually Mompesson relaxed the speed with which the osier wand was turning, until at length it moved so slowly it took several seconds to describe the circle. Then one end of the rod gradually began to sink, until it pointed downward at a particular spot within the cave; while Mompesson, with a proportionate gradience, lowered his arm until the point of the osier touched the ground.

"'Tis there!" he ejaculated: "'tis there that the treasure lies buried! This is the third time since the sun rose that I have put it to the test!"

"After all," whispered Lady Galbraith, "any one can make a stick point in whatsoever direction one chooses."

"But it is not every one whose stick is a divining rod," said the Lord Chamberlain, "nor who can make it point to a treasure. If I might venture humbly to suggest to her gracious Majesty, I would propose that this dwarf should be solicited, with all due kindness and forbearance, to afford us a proof of his gifts of divination."

"Stop!" said the Queen; "there is a question or two I would ask him! Worthy stranger," she said, raising her voice from a low whispering to an audible tone, "suppose that you had made up your mind to dig in this cavern, where may your implements be? for I see none—and methinks that if on every occasion you halted for the purpose of delving or mining after treasures, you borrowed spades and pickaxes of the residents in the neighbourhood, your pursuit could scarcely be rendered as secret and stealthy as such pursuits usually are."

"The implements which on such occasions I have been accustomed to use, gracious Queen," replied Mompesson, "are of a very peculiar construction,—light yet strong, and admirably adapted for the purpose. They were borne in a box by the good steed which my faithful page bestrode; and, alas! the loss of those implements was one of the topics of my mournful thoughts when your Highness and this brilliant cavalcade so abruptly bared upon my view!"

"Then you require implements for delving in this cave?" said the Queen.

"Even so," returned Mompesson.

"Perhaps you would fain have assistance also?" continued Margaret inquiringly.

The dwarf gave a sudden start: he seemed to shudder as if a sensation of horror had seized upon him; and then he said in a low, altered, half-frightened tone, "No, gracious lady! no! That were sealing the destruction of the gift which I possess!—that were wilfully extinguishing the star which shines benignantly upon me!"

Margaret's suspicions were aroused that she was dealing with an impostor: but then she asked herself, "For what earthly purpose could he be deceiving me or inventing such a series of idle tales? He assuredly is not a madman! No!—there is all the readiness of a lucid intelligence in his discourse! But can he be telling me the truth? I will put him to the test."

These reflections swept through the Queen's mind with lightning rapidity; and she said to Mompesson, "You require implements—and you shall have them. You do not need assistance—and it shall not be forced upon you. But will you suffer me to witness the result of your experiments here? Stop one moment ere you answer my question!—for I swear to you as a Queen, that whatsoever you may find buried in this cavern, shall be your own, no matter how great the amount! Neither shall any one dare molest, waylay, or hinder you in afterwards disposing of such treasure according to your own good will and inclination. In short, I am

anxious to gratify my curiosity—for you have told me wonderful things; and if you will demonstrate the truth thereof, I shall feel bound to testify my gratitude by the strict fidelity with which all these pledges on my part shall be fulfilled."

"I will do my best to give your Majesty a proof the most signal and complete," replied Mompesson, "of my veracity and of the existence of this divining gift which I possess. But suffer me at the very outset to observe that though I entertain not the slightest doubt of the existence of gold or silver beneath the soil in yonder cavern, I know not the amount that may be there—nor can I estimate the depth at which it shall be found."

"Ah!" whispered Lady Galbraith, with a sneer, "he is already finding a loophole of retreat!"

"He is doing nothing of the kind!" quickly retorted Mompesson, who either suspected or else overheard (the latter most probably, for his ears were keen) the remark which had just fallen from Lady Galbraith's lips: then, as she coloured and drew herself up indignantly, though not without flinging a somewhat dubious glance upon the dwarf as if she fancied that after all he might be more or less connected with the Evil One,—Mompesson went on to say, "But that there is gold or silver here, I am positively convinced—in some quantity more or less, and at some depth greater or lesser! Your Majesty shall put me to the test."

"Ah! this is speaking fairly, indeed!" ejaculated the Queen. "But tell me how. What mode can you suggest?"

"In the first place," said Mompesson, "let one or more of your Grace's dependants take torches, penetrate into the cavern, and assure themselves that there is no outlet of any kind save and except the mouth which here constitutes the entrance."

Queen Margaret made a signal to the Lord Chamberlain; and this functionary at once issued his orders to the effect that the dwarf's wishes should be complied with. A couple of pages sprang from their steeds—the boughs of a resinous tree were quickly torn off—a light was struck, for Mompesson himself had the requisite materials about his person—and the two torches were soon blazing.

"With due deference to your Majesty," said the dwarf, "I think it would be much better if that great nobleman who rides by your Grace's side, would condescend to accompany the torch-bearers; for the assurance of so high an authority would as a matter of course have additional weight, when imparting whatsoever he may have at the end of the search to communicate to your Majesty."

"Let us humour him, my lord," said Margaret in a rapid whisper.

"At your will, most gracious Queen:—and the Lord Chamberlain leapt from his horse.

He accompanied the torch-bearers and Mompesson into the cave; and there they looked about in every direction,—or rather, we should say, that the Lord Chamberlain and the two pages thus scrutinisingly examined the place, in order to ascertain whether there were any means of egress or ingress with the exception of the mouth. We have already partially described its dimensions: we may now add that, after forming a square chamber so to speak, the cave grew gradually narrower and narrower as it advanced farther into the hill in whose bowels nature or art had hollowed it. At length it terminated at a distance of about fifty yards from the external opening; and there was not the slightest indication of any secret outlet.

"Well, my lord," said the Queen, when the party re-appeared from the interior of the cave, "what report have you to make? and what is the result of your exploring expedition?"

"May it please your Highness," responded the Lord Chamberlain, "there is assuredly no secret issue nor outlet of any description. If a person were immured therein—the mouth, be it understood, being walled up—I defy him to make his escape—unless indeed such an individual might happen to possess the faculty of a rabbit, and burrow for himself an avenue of egress."

"It is for you, sir stranger," said the Queen, addressing herself to the dwarf, "to intimate the next step that is to be taken, now that your first commands have been complied with."

"Yonder," said Mompesson, "is my steed; and I have to request that he be looked after for the period during which I am about to disappear from the world."

All eyes were turned in the direction to which the dwarf pointed: and a somewhat sorry-looking animal was seen feeding at a short distance.

"I can promise you," said the Queen, "that your horse shall be cared for in the stables of Urquhart Castle."

"The brute is scarcely worth the trouble of so many kind words being bestowed upon it," muttered Lady Galbraith.

Mompesson however expressed his thankfulness to the Queen; and he then said, "If your Highness would now despatch some one to fetch the implements which I require, there need be no delay in the completion of this matter."

"Name the implements that you require," said Margaret, "and they shall be procured."

"There is a farm-house close by, may it please your Majesty," observed the Lord Chamberlain, "where we might procure what we want, and where curiosity would prompt the asking of no questions when once it should be known that your Highness had sent to require such objects."

"Let some one depart at once," said the Queen: and the Lord Chamberlain gave the command accordingly, the dwarf having intimated what he required. "And now, sir stranger," continued her Majesty, "things are progressing, you see, entirely according to your wish: what is the next thing to be accomplished?"

"Nothing more nor less, may it please your Grace," answered the dwarf, "than to follow the suggestion which that great nobleman ere now threw out, though perhaps unconsciously: namely, to immure me in this cavern, so that unless I possess the faculties of a rabbit it is utterly impossible I can escape thence."

Several ejaculations of astonishment burst forth; and Margaret exclaimed, "Are you actually serious, worthy sir?"

"Most serious, royal lady," replied Mompesson.

"We shall see some subterfuge yet," muttered Lady Galbraith.

"Here are the materials," continued the dwarf, glancing around upon the fragments of crag which were scattered about, "for building up a solid wall at the mouth of this cavern: and your Highness has a sufficiency of male dependants in your suite to do the work deftly and well. But remember, gracious Queen, that I must be permitted a sufficiency of time to devote unto those spiritual communings which are naturally associated with the gift of divination and with the task I shall have in hand."

"Name your own conditions," said the Queen, more and more astonished at what was taking place, and more and more inclined to wonder whether this were a mere mockery and a farce, and whether the dwarf would not in the long run find some subtle means of excusing himself from the fulfilment of his promise.

"I require, royal lady," answered Mompesson, "that once every day an adequate quantity of food shall be furnished me through a small opening that is to be left in the upper part of the wall presently to be built. I stipulate moreover that the individual bearing this food shall content himself with simply thrusting it through the aperture—and that he will instantaneously take his departure on each occasion, without speaking a single syllable. I crave furthermore, gracious Queen, that I may remain unmolested and undisturbed in the silence and solitude of this cavern—that the royal mandate will go forth amongst those now present to the effect that they tell not the tale elsewhere, and that they come not near the cave in any mood of impertinent curiosity, either by night or by day, nor on any pretext or excuse."

"All this shall be done, sir stranger," answered the Queen. "But for how many days are these instructions to be obeyed?"

"Ah! that is more than I can tell you, gracious Queen," rejoined Mompesson. "Everything depends upon the progress that shall be made towards the discovery of the treasure. It may be three days—it may be five days—it may be eight—or it may be ten days."

"Yes—I perceive," said the Queen; "and my question was a senseless one."

"Rest assured, gracious Highness," resumed Mompesson, "that the moment I have any good tidings to impart, I shall be only too glad to break silence, and bid the messenger who brings me my provisions hasten to your Majesty with the intelligence. I beseech that all these conditions may be complied with; for if they be in any sense violated, horrible consequences may ensue!—death may become my portion—ill fortune will follow in the footsteps of the daring or the imprudent one who shall venture to break the solemn silence wherein I am bound to remain entombed until I myself shall see that the moment is come to open my lips!"

"On the word of a Queen," said Margaret, "all your stipulations shall be complied with. If you wish it, sentinels shall day and night be posted at a distance of one hundred yards from the walled-up mouth of the cavern—"

"Gracious Queen," said the Lord Chamberlain, "if once your mandate be issued, no one will dare venture to violate a single tittle of these instructions."

"No, lady," added Mompesson,—"not another precaution is requisite; for no one will dare to violate your instructions!"

"Then everything shall be as you have stipulated," said Margaret.

Mompesson bowed twice to the Queen; and then turning to the Lord Chamberlain, he said, "It is for you, O exalted functionary! to superintend the process that is next to take place. Look! here are the masses of crag which your followers can build up against the mouth of the cavern! All the interstices must they fill up with clay, so that the prying eye of curiosity may not peep in upon mine avocations. An aperture, to serve for the admission of light and air, must be left high up. This will also avail for the purpose of passing in the daily supply of food for my sustenance. Ah! here is a piece of wood, coming most opportune to hand! It will serve as a shelf or ledge within that aperture, whereon to place the provender. And now to work! I have naught more to say."

Mompesson caught up the piece of wood to which he had alluded; he likewise snatched up a small valise from behind the fragment of crag on which he had been seated; and with another most respectful obeisance to the Queen, he passed into the

cavern,—not forgetting to take his divining-rod with him.

"I really know not whether I ought to suffer the matter to go any further," said Margaret, who until this moment had thought that Mompesson would devise an excuse for retreating from his compact.

"I am sure that after all this parley," said Lady Galbraith, "I should see what would be the result."

"Besides, it can do no possible harm," suggested another lady; "for the dwarf will have his meals regularly supplied—and he will at least have the opportunity once every day of notifying to some one that he is tired of playing the part of an impostor, if an imposture it be."

"True!" said the Queen: "and therefore if an imposture it really be, let him experience the punishment which he will have prepared for himself. Proceed, my lord!" exclaimed Margaret aloud, addressing herself to the Chamberlain; "and see that the task be done expeditiously."

Several of the nobles and gentlemen in attendance upon Margaret, had alighted from their steeds in order to assist in the work which was now to take place. The menials and pages were already on the spot, preparing to roll the huge fragments of stone up to the mouth of the cavern. Mompesson was seated inside; and the work of immurement proceeded briskly. In a few minutes the delving implements that had been sent for, were brought; and these, one being passed into the cave for Mompesson, were in the first instance used to procure a quantity of clay from the bank of an adjacent rivulet. With this clay—thick, heavy, and adhesive—the interstices amongst the rudely constructed wall, were filled up; so that the appearance which the work presently offered to the view was that of a massive and compact piece of masonry. Higher it rose—for there were ten or a dozen pair of hands at work; and the Lord Chamberlain superintended the proceeding. At length the delving implements were passed in and thus consigned to the possession of the dwarf; and then the uppermost layer of craggy blocks was placed,—an aperture being left, about a foot square. Just inside this aperture the piece of wood to which we have before alluded, was fixed as a shelf by Mompesson himself,—he climbing up for the purpose on the jutting masses of the wall which presented its inner surface towards him.

And now the work was done; and the Lord Chamberlain, by Margaret's command, inquired of Mompesson whether he wished to retreat from his compact and be set at liberty at once?—for that if such were the case, he would be fully pardoned for having trifled with the Queen. But the dwarf replied in a firm tone from the interior of the cavern, "Let every condition be maintained towards me, and I will abide by my compact!"

The Queen and her cavalcade then rode away from the spot; and they bent their way homeward in the direction of Urquhart Castle,—a page being sent to fetch the sorry-looking brute of a horse which Mompesson had pined out as his own, and which was presently housed with all possible care in the stables of the royal fortalices.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE CAVERNS.

THE rays of July's afternoon sun, streaming through the aperture left in the upper part of the wall at the mouth of the cave, fell upon the dwarf's hideous countenance, which was expanding with a grin of

cardonic triumph as the royal cavalcade rode away from the spot. Then Mompesson gave three or four leaps about the interior of the cavern, just such as a baboon might have indulged in for the purpose of expressing its delight at some bounty received or some mischievous freak accomplished.

But not long did the dwarf abandon himself to his hilarity; for he had work to do—and he was bound to accomplish it expeditiously. Snatching up one of the delving implements which had been furnished him, he passed on to the innermost extremity of the cave, which, as we have already said, was about fifty yards in length. He began to remove away the earth on what might be termed the floor of the cavern; and at a depth of about a foot and a half, he came to a square stone which looked as if it covered the mouth of a well. The dwarf lifted this stone by means of an iron ring which was fastened in the middle of it; and a flight of steps was revealed. They were cut out of the hard soil; and though in some places they were crumbled and broken, yet altogether they constituted a safe and easy means of descent.

Mompesson had about him the materials for striking a light; and at the head of those steps there was a torch ready prepared, which in a few moments was in a blaze. Down the steps Mompesson went, with the unhesitating readiness of one who was acquainted with the spot; and he reached another cave, which was precisely underneath the first-mentioned, and which thus constituted as it were a lower storey. The fresh air penetrated from some crevice or opening—for the torch blazed brightly and the dwarf breathed freely.

This lower cave, which was some twenty feet beneath the upper one, contained a variety of warlike materials—or rather, we should say, the remnants of them—scattered about upon the ground. There were pieces of armour, shields, and weapons, all covered with rust: there were garments which had rotted into a material that can only be likened to a mass of black dense fetid cobwebs; and there were portions of the wheels of some massive engines of warfare. There were likewise human bones to be seen scattered here and there; and as the dwarf passed along through this cavern, his foot sent a human skull rolling as if it were a football. But the skull came into contact with a helmet all embrowned with rust; and breaking to pieces, the relic of mortality crumbled almost into powder. Perhaps that very helmet had once covered the head of which that skull was all that remained!—and perhaps when the casque itself shone in the glory of its own metallic brightness, and was embellished with waving plumes, the head which it protected and adorned might have been that of a handsome knight, the object of admiration on the part of a beauteous lady-love who might have been doomed to lament his sudden disappearance and unknown death!

It was not however any such sentimental reflection as this which passed through the mind of Mompesson, as he made his way through the cave, heedless of the skull which his foot had trundled like a ball, and reckless of the bones which crunched beneath his steps. He went on until he reached a spot where lay the wheels to which we have already alluded. Mompesson now examined them carefully, yet expeditiously, one after another,—until he selected that which was the most perfect. It was about three feet in diameter—heavy and massive—and having evidently belonged to some ponderous engine of warfare. Now, as no such engines had of late years been used in war, it was tolerably apparent from this circumstance—as well as from the rusted, mouldering, decaying condition of the ob-

jects contained in the cavern—that a long, long period had elapsed since the living warriors themselves had taken refuge there, or else had made it alike a tomb for their dead and a secret magazine for their warlike implements. Or else—who could tell?—the cavern might have been the haunt of banditti?—though this was the *least* probable theory of all those which suggested themselves in reference to the subterranean, inasmuch as a horde of lawless plunderers were but little likely to possess or even to require engines of war.

However—leaving speculation apart, at least for the present—we will follow the proceedings of Mompesson: Having selected the particular wheel which he thought would be most suitable for his purpose, he provided himself with several other fragmentary portions of one of the warlike machines to which the several wheels had belonged. He then retraced his way up the flight of steps, into the upper cave—the opening at the head of those steps being just large enough from one angle to another for the wheel to be passed through it.

And now Mompesson went to work just within the wall which had been built up at the mouth of the upper cavern. This wall was about six feet high; an aperture of a foot square had been left in the middle of the uppermost layer of stones and craggy blocks; and just inside that aperture, be it recollected, Mompesson had fixed a piece of wood so that it might serve as a shelf. As the wall was all rugged, the dwarf could climb up and down at will. He now clambered up, and took away the piece of wood which he had put up as a shelf, and to the existence of which he had been so particularly careful in directing the attention of the royal cavalcade. He next proceeded to fix this piece of wood on to the upper part of the wheel—which was readily accomplished; for the broken wheels in the lower cavern had supplied nails, and a sword hilt served for a hammer.

Mompesson's next proceeding was to raise up a framework sufficiently high for the erection of his wheel at the point where it was designed to act. He drove two long upright pieces of wood into the ground; a portion of the wheel's original axle was now brought into requisition; and the wheel itself was presently fixed in such a manner that the piece of wood nailed on to it, was exactly on a level with the aperture in the highest part of the wall. Yes—just where the wood was at first when fixed to represent a shelf, so was it now in its position of a horizontal tangent to the top of the circle or wheel.

Thus far Mompesson had developed his ingenious contrivances with the greatest success: but there was yet something to be done—and this required an even greater amount of tact and delicate skill than the former part of his proceedings. He took from his valise, or diminutive mail-trunk which he had with him, a coil of rope,—with which he had provided himself at a neighbouring village on the preceding day. For, as the reader may have perceived, Mompesson was not adopting all the details of his present measures on the spur of the moment: he had pre-arranged them—they were the results of foregone calculations—the realization of that which he had hoped sooner or later to bring about, though he had little dared expect that fortune would so speedily and so signally crown his wishes with success.

And now, by the aid of that coil of rope, Mompesson adjusted two weights to the wheel, in such a manner that when it had made a revolution, the piece of wood serving as the shelf should always come uppermost. The weights were heavy—the cord was twisted many times round the axle of the wheel; and thus the wheel itself would only move

very slowly. Still it was so nicely balanced that of whichever end of the moving shelf the greater weight rested, the wheel would begin to turn slowly in the same direction.

When Mompesson's mechanical arrangements were complete, he again danced three or four times for joy about the cave. Then he clambered up against the rugged surface of the wall:—he placed pieces of stone and lumps of earth upon the shelf—and it was with infinite delight that he beheld the wheel commence slowly to revolve, and as a matter of course throw down those objects from the moveable shelf in its descent. And round would go the wheel until the shelf came uppermost again; and then, as Mompesson rested his hand upon that shelf, it seemed just as firm and solid as if it were still fixed in the interstices of the stones of the two upper layers.

Having convinced himself that thus far his mechanical contrivance would accomplish the desired aim, the dwarf proceeded to take the next step in his well-studied and accurately defined arrangements. He descended into the lower cavern:—thence he brought up a large quantity of grass which he had gathered on the preceding day; and this he spread all along the mouth of the cave just within the wall, on each side of the wheel. He gave his mechanism one last trial: and still feeling confident that it would work successfully, he prepared for the next portion of the enterprise which he had in hand. He took from his valise a suit of dark garments, which comprised a species of large cape that was in those times much worn by the Scotch people when travelling or when engaged in open-air pursuits. Mompesson likewise had a large bottle filled with a peculiar kind of dye, of his own discovery and decoction—and which, while it would defy the cleansing powers of rain or of an accidental souse in a stream or river, would nevertheless readily yield to the application of some other compound with which the dwarf was acquainted.

Now therefore commenced Mompesson's toilet. He took off the flaring parti-coloured garments which he had previously worn for the very purpose of rendering himself conspicuous; and he assumed the quiet, sombre-hued apparel for the sake of eluding observation. He then dyed his matted hair and beard, so that it was quickly changed from a dirty tawny-yellowish colour, to an almost complete blackness. This made a vast difference in the appearance of the dwarf; for it no longer seemed as if his component parts were an ugly lion's head placed on the form of a stunted imp. The form itself was just the same, it is true; but every one knows how much depends upon the head for purposes of personal identification.

Mompesson's toilet being completed, he secured about his person such little necessities as he might require for the journey whereon he was about to enter: but he left the valise and his parti-coloured garments, as well as other articles of his wardrobe, in the cavern. He descended the steps, and reached the lower cave. We have said that it lay precisely beneath the upper one; and therefore from the steps to the farther extremity it was about fifty yards in length. Where was the issue from this place? It looked like a gallery at the bottom of a mine whence there is no means of egress except by means of the shaft. But Mompesson had not been three or four days in that neighbourhood without having used his wits keenly in every respect.

Close by where the steps descended into the lower cavern, Mompesson pushed hard against what seemed to be a solid wall of rock: but this wall nevertheless opened in the form of two folding-doors; and when thus thrown back, they left an

entrance of at least five feet in width and six feet in height. They were hewn masses of rock, which had been artificially fixed there—not by means of hinges, but by pegs or projections left at the top and bottom, to serve as pivots working in holes fashioned for the purpose. Through this strangely contrived opening Mompesson passed, carrying his torch with him; and it was with no particular amount of toil that he closed the doors of rock again, so admirably were they balanced. He was now in another cave, or long irregular passage, the height and width of which were about the same as the dimensions of the opening which the stone portals filled up. For upwards of a hundred yards this cavern wound its way through the bowels of the mountain; and when at length a glimmer of light was seen in the distance, Mompesson extinguished his torch. But he did not recklessly fling it down at random anywhere: he was careful to deposit it in a species of niche formed in the side of the cave—as if he calculated that he should have need for that torch again.

He continued his way: the daylight grew stronger and stronger—and in a few moments the dwarf reached the outer extremity of the cave. But that opening was so densely covered with furze, creeping plants, bushes, and overhanging evergreens, that if this were the first time Mompesson had found himself in front of that leafy barrier, he would perhaps have wondered whether he should ever have been enabled to get through it. It seemed as if it might have served as a sufficient defence-work against the slimy snake and other gliding reptiles. But Mompesson thrust aside one dense bush—and then a species of pathway was opened before him: that is to say, it was so far a path that he was enabled to pursue his course with comparative ease—merely putting aside the boughs and vines with his arms, while his feet trampled through the underwood. For some thirty or forty yards did he thus make his way through the maze, until he reached the extremity of the tangled grove. And now he cautiously peeped forth and looked all around: but no one was to be seen.

Mompesson issued from that grove: he was now in a strangely wild and horrid-looking ravine at the back of one of the heights which overhung Glen Urquhart. The series of caves through which we have seen him pass, had brought him from Glen Urquhart, through the bowels of the mountain, into the bed of this ravine. He continued his way along the bank of a wildly gushing stream; and in about a quarter of an hour he suddenly gave a joyous leap, at the same time ejaculating, "He is here, all safe!"

The object that thus elicited the cheerful cry, was the handsome, well-bred, and able steed which Mompesson had mounted when setting out from Dalkeith Castle upwards of a week back. The sorry brute which we have seen him consign with so much affected carefulness to the charge of the royal cavalcade, was an animal that he had purchased of a wayfarer some few days previous; and his object in parading the creature in Glen Urquhart must be sufficiently obvious. Was it not to be supposed that he was to remain walled up for awhile in the cavern?—and was it not therefore the most natural thing in the world that he should wish to have his horse taken care of in comfortable stables during his voluntary captivity?

But there was in reality to be no such immurement for Mompesson—no such prolonged prisonage in the cave. As for the horse which was supposed to be his own,—while it was enjoying itself with the good provender in the stables of Urquhart Castle, the steed which was veritably the prized and

serviceable one was about to bear its master on a long journey.

We have said that the ravine where Mompesson found his steed pasturing upon some rich herbage, was wild and savage-looking. It was just the spot where lawless men might have harboured, supposing that such was indeed the character of those who had fashioned the artificial caves with a view that the lower ones should be concealed in so admirable a manner. Or again, it was just the place where clansmen engaged in feudal strife would concentrate a reserve of men and a depot of arms, to be in readiness to act as the information of their spies might suggest, throughout all the surrounding districts—to appear suddenly where least expected—to disappear as abruptly, leaving behind the impression that they were ubiquitous and even gifted with preternatural powers. And then too, in earlier times, Castle Urquhart had sustained many a siege—had occasionally been scaled and stormed—but had more frequently beheld the enemy beaten back and put to flight. Then, on these latter occurrences, the garrison were accustomed to sally forth to pursue the discomfited ones—to follow them up without mercy—to track them to fastness and to cave, to mountain and to glen, to strath and to ravine,—showing no quarter. What, then, was more probable than that at some long bygone period one of these fugitive bands had sought refuge in this cave of which the secret was known to them—that thither they had transported some of their wounded, who subsequently died there—that being closely pursued, they dragged their engines of warfare into the cavern, in order to avoid leaving anything in the route which might indicate their track; or else that they had waited there for reinforcements which never came, and that circumstances afterwards prevented the fugitive survivors from ever going back to bury their dead or to fetch the massive projectile engines which they had left there!

Scotland abounds in curious caves,—many naturally formed, but artificially fashioned and shaped,—others altogether artificial, and representing as it were in the bosom of some mountain the arrangements and storeys of a house. The reader must not therefore suppose that there is anything exaggerated in the description which we have given of those caves which lay in the bowels of a hill looking on beauteous Glen Urquhart on one side, and on that small but savage and uninhabited ravine on the other side. No doubt the openings into those caves from that wild ravine had purposely been made large enough to admit horses as well as men, and even engines of warfare; and as for the swinging of the portals of rock—cut thick enough for protection, and thin enough to revolve easily—they were comparatively simple contrivances when we think of how doors of solid masonry opened in the walls of old Gothic castles, and closed so hermetically that the very outlines of their shape and setting should not be seen. Then, in reference to the grove in front of the mouth of the long passage-cavern, there was no doubt at one time a pathway wide enough for the engines of warfare to pass through; and as the place fell into disuse, this pathway became overgrown with vines and underwood, helping to increase the density of the grove, but yet not sufficiently strong or elaborate to prevent a human form from forcing its way through when once a keen scrutiny had detected all the circumstances of the spot.

We will not pause to describe how Mompesson, on arriving in that district, had happened to fix upon that very ravine as a temporary place of concealment while he made his observations about the

neighbourhood and ascertained the habits of the Queen and her Court,—nor how it was that partly by accident, and partly by his own keenness, he had been led on to the discovery of the mysteries of the caverns,—how, on finding the secret means of penetrating from the lower one into the upper, he had carefully covered over with earth the stone at the head of the ascent of steps—and how therefore with all possible confidence he had bidden the Lord Chamberlain and the torch-bearers enter that upper cavern to assure themselves that there was no secret outlet nor issue. Suffice it to say that all this *had* happened; and that the instant Mompesson had discovered the mysteries of those strangely constructed caverns, his plan had to a certain extent shadowed itself forth in his mind—and then, as we have already hinted, circumstances had occurred to afford his project a development more speedy than he could have expected, and quite as successful as in his wildest imaginings he had ever ventured to hope.

But let us take leave of Mompesson for the present. He had now set out upon a journey, which, according to the lowest computation he could venture to make, would occupy eight clear days: at the same time he was resolved to spare no exertions in order to abridge that period if possible. The Queen's orders had been peremptorily given with regard to the conduct to be pursued towards Mompesson, who was supposed to be so securely immured in the cavern as to be utterly unable to issue thence except by assistance from without. Those commands on the part of her Majesty were reiterated with an equal degree of authoritativeness when the cavalcade returned to the castle. No one, on pain of her severest displeasure, was to approach the cavern during the dwarf's residence there,—except the individual whom she might appoint to take him his meals. She was making an experiment which interested her; and she was resolved that it should be carried out effectually, so far as the stipulations of the dwarf and her own pledges to him were concerned. She fixed upon a silent, trustworthy warder of Urquhart Castle, named Beattie, as the individual who was to wait upon Mompesson. She bade him proceed every morning at eight o'clock to the cave, and to thrust through the aperture an ample supply of provender for four-and-twenty hours,—substantial viands, a stone jar of water, and a smaller flask containing wine. She enjoined Beattie to stow these articles neatly in a little basket—to place the basket on the shelf within the aperture—and instantaneously to take his departure. She forbade him on any account to speak a syllable to the immured dwarf—not to linger for a single moment for the purpose of alluring him into conversation, or even seeing whether he on his own side might wish to break through the rule which himself had laid down, and hold conversational intercourse with a fellow-creature. Beattie faithfully promised to adhere to all the commands he thus received; and Margaret knew that her instructions would be implicitly attended to.

Therefore, every morning precisely at eight o'clock, the taciturn and faithful Beattie bent his way along the glen, carrying a little basket in his hand. On reaching the wall which had been built against the mouth of the cavern, he quickly climbed up to the aperture—thrust in the basket—leapt down—and hastened away without even so much as casting a single look behind him. And on each occasion of his return to Urquhart Castle, the Queen inquired what had happened: but Beattie's answer was always the same.

"May it please your Majesty, I placed the basket on the shelf within the aperture. I spoke not a syllable—and not a word was spoken to me."

Thus nine days passed away. During this interval Margaret received intelligence to the effect that the Countess of Morton was paying a temporary visit to Dalkeith; but it was believed that her presence there was merely for the purpose of superintending the renovation of the apartments which through disuse, damp, and neglect, had been falling into decay. It did not appear, from aught that reached Margaret's knowledge, that King David had paid Dalkeith a visit. Indeed, she had about this time received a letter from him, conveying the intelligence that he was passing a few days at Dryburgh Abbey in Roxburghshire; and that he should afterwards repair to Dundonald Castle in Ayrshire, for the purpose of receiving English Commissioners whom he had invited to negotiate for a settlement of the exact border-line betwixt the two kingdoms, and also for other amicable purposes.

Nine days passed, we say;—and on each successive morning the little basket of provisions was delivered at the cave. On the tenth morning, when the faithful Beattie arrived on the spot, the hideous countenance of the dwarf, surrounded with tawny matted hair, appeared on the inner side of the opening; and he exclaimed, "What ho! my good man! This time, at least, there will be a few words exchanged between us!"

"Not unless your pledges are accomplished on the one hand," returned Beattie, "or that on the other you confess yourself an impostor:"—for the warder had his cue as to the answer that he was to give.

"Then may we discourse with all propriety and in all safety," replied Mompesson. "It is not that I am wearied of this life of solitude, and silence, and semi-obscurity; because my occupation is a happy companionship in itself. But I have accomplished all that the powers of divination would enable me to perform; and consequently there is no longer any need for me to tarry here."

"I will forthwith bear your message to her Majesty," rejoined the warder. "Meanwhile take your basket with the wonted refectings; and rest assured that in a short space you will become the object of renewed attention on the part of her Highness."

Beattie hastened away; and at about eleven in the forenoon, the brilliant cavalcade, with the superb Margaret at its head, was seen dashing along Glen Urquhart towards the scene of the supposed experiment in the art of divination. But Mompesson, behind the massive stone barrier, was well prepared to confront the Queen of Scotland.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE TREASURE.

THAT brilliant cavalcade, with the royal Margaret at its head, dashed up to the spot where the massive wall had been built against the entrance of the cavern; and the hideous countenance of the dwarf was beheld looking through the aperture at the top. The Queen was full of the excitement of curiosity; the Lord Chamberlain, who rode at her left hand, expressed his wonder as to what would be the result of the test to which the dwarf had been put; and even Lady Galbraith was so far interested that she abstained from making any ill-natured observation. Indeed, the sentiment of curiosity was naturally strong amongst all the members, male and female, of the royal cortege.

"And thus it is your wish, worthy stranger," said

the Queen, addressing Mompesson with a kind tone and gracious looks, "to be liberated from that sepulchral cave?"

"It is my wish, may it please your Highness," answered the dwarf, "inasmuch as the object for which I consented to be imprisoned here has been accomplished. Be pleased, gracious Queen, to order this barrier of stone blocks to be cast down; and your royal eye shall witness the result of divination's power."

Margaret made a sign to the Lord Chamberlain, who accordingly issued prompt instructions to the menials attendant upon the courtly train; and nearly a dozen stalwart individuals sprang forward to commence the demolition of the thick wall. Their swords and daggers were used as implements for the purpose; and the fragments of rock with which the wall had been built up, were speedily scattered about. When the wall was low enough to enable the eyes of the foremost of the cavalcade to plunge their regards into the cavern, the dwarf was seen leaning upon a spade and calmly contemplating the work that was in progress for effecting his release. He was clad in precisely the same style as when he first met the eyes of that courtly company ten days back:—he wore his parti coloured garments, his tall pointed cap, and his elongated slippers; but all his raiment was much soiled, as if he had in reality worn it without change for that period of ten days, and likewise toiled arduously with the delving implements. Presently the entire wall was demolished; and then it was observed that Mompesson stood upon the brink of a hole he had dug in the earth; and piles of the upturned soil were seen behind him. All eyes were strained to catch a glimpse of the treasure which everybody now felt certain must have been discovered by the dwarf; and the intensest curiosity prevailed. Mompesson advanced with a respectful demeanour towards the Queen: his whole appearance was unquestionably corroborative of the idea that he had been actually sealed up, as it were, within that cavern: he was squalid and dirty—his hair and his beard were all matted—and it did indeed seem as if the head of the ugliest of all possible lions had been fixed upon the body of the most distorted of all possible imps.

Perhaps it may be as well to observe that none of the mechanism which Mompesson had so carefully erected and combined, now met the eye. The wheel was not there: the upright posts which had supported its axle—the ropes with the weights—all had disappeared! There was not a trace to indicate that any such contrivances had existed in the cavern. And as for the means of communication with the secret flight of steps at the extremity of the cave, that was most carefully concealed,—the earth having been replaced over the stone trap-door, and trodden down to a degree of hardness which made that particular spot correspond exactly with all the other parts of the cavern's floor. But let us see what now took place when the wall was completely removed and the interior of the cave was thrown open to the view of the royal party congregated in front of it.

"May it please your gracious Majesty," said the dwarf, "to dismount and enter the cavern."

The Lord Chamberlain instantaneously sprang from his steed, and proffered his hand to assist Margaret to alight from her palfrey. This was a signal that those who thought fit to dismount likewise were at liberty to do so; and in another moment every saddle was empty. Mompesson led the way into the cave, the Queen following closely—the Lord Chamberlain and Lady Galbraith coming next—the other lords, ladies, gentlemen, and squires of the courtly

train, forming a semicircle about the entrance of the cavern.

And now it was discerned that the dwarf had dug a pit about fifteen feet deep; for the reader may be well assured that Mompesson had been very careful not to proceed to any greater depth, for fear lest he should break through the ceiling of the hidden cave beneath.

"Your Majesty must not suppose," the dwarf at once exclaimed, "that I have been entirely occupied throughout nine clear days in digging this one pit only. On the contrary! I have laboured from morning until night in penetrating the soil: pit after pit have I hollowed out—and still for some reason or another the divining rod was at fault. At length I verily began to despair, and to marvel whether I should be enabled to struggle against the causes of each consecutive failure;—but at last my perseverance was rewarded. At the bottom of this pit there is a vase embedded in the soil. I have but raised its cover for a single moment, to assure myself that it contains the precious metal; and I have left it there, to be dealt with according to the good pleasure of your most gracious Majesty."

"I have already promised you," replied the Queen, "that whatsoever amount of treasure you might by your own divining power discover in Glen Urquhart, should be considered your own lawful property, without questioning or dispute. Descend therefore—bring up this vase—suffer me to behold the contents—and most sincerely do I hope for your sake that the treasure will be sufficient to recompense you for the imprisonment of ten days which you have undergone, and the toils which you have endured."

Mompesson expressed his gratitude to Margaret for the kindness with which she was treating him; and he lost not a moment in descending into the pit. A piece of wood, with a cord attached to the middle thereof, was laid across the mouth of the opening; and down that cord did Mompesson glide in the twinkling of an eye. When at the bottom of the pit, he fastened the extremity of the rope round the neck of a large earthenware jar which was there; and he begged that some one above would have the kindness to draw it up. This was speedily accomplished by the Lord Chamberlain himself; for that high functionary not only perceived that Queen Margaret's curiosity was piqued to the utmost, but he himself likewise felt deeply anxious to witness the result of the experiment. The jar stood about two feet high, and was about a foot in diameter in its widest part. It was heavy; but as it was covered with a lid made of the same earthenware material, the anxious eyes of those who stood around it could not immediately be gratified with a view of its contents.

"Let not the vase be opened," said Queen Margaret, "until the discoverer of the treasure shall be here with his own hand to raise the lid."

The rope was lowered again into the pit; and Mompesson climbed up it with as much agility as if he were veritably of that monkey tribe which in some respects he so much resembled. Falling upon one knee, he lifted the lid with his left hand: with his right he drew forth a quantity of coins; and presenting them to the Queen, he said, "Behold, gracious lady! here is a sample of the treasure which the vase contains."

The Queen took the coins and proceeded to examine them. They were tarnished—they were much defaced—and their whole appearance indicated that they had been for some time enclosed in the jar from which they were just taken. We need hardly say that they were contemplated with the utmost curiosity by the Queen and the members of the



courtly train, amongst whom they were handed around. Many attempts were made to decipher the letters that were impressed upon them: but a considerable time elapsed ere this aim could be satisfactorily achieved. At length the Lord Chamberlain—partly by his own knowledge of the subject, and partly aided by hints from Mompesson—came to the conclusion that the coins belonged to a period of at least a century back. On chipping some of the pieces by means of a very sharp dagger, it was found that the gold was evidently of a good quality: and the Lord Chamberlain said to the dwarf, "Methinks, sir stranger, that if the jar be filled to the bottom with these coins, you will indeed find an ample remuneration for whatsoever annoyance, trouble, or inconvenience you may have undergone."

Mompesson proceeded to empty the jar and its contents; but it soon appeared that the golden coins only constituted a layer at the top, and that at least two-thirds of the vase were occupied with silver ornaments, of a sacred character, such as belonged to the altars of chapels and oratories. That these ornaments were of real silver, was proved by the same process as that which had been applied to the golden coins; and thus, though the treasure was certainly diminished in value from what the first estimate had been, it nevertheless constituted a very handsome windfall or godsend for the dwarf.

That his powers of divination were fully proven, every one present was bound to admit: scepticism could exist no longer—no, not even in the thoughts of the strong-minded, clear-headed Lady Galbraith. But be it recollected that whatsoever was marvellous, obtained a far more ready credence in those days than would be the case in the present time; and every one, even the most enlightened, was more or less prone to superstitious beliefs. Thus Margaret and all the members of her courtly train now contemplated Mompesson with mingled respect, surprise, and awe; and the idea of his supreme ugliness was mitigated, if not altogether absorbed, by the impression that he was a being of a rarely gifted character.

"I would fain ask you a question or two, sir stranger," said the Queen, "if you would not take it amiss or fancy that I am pushing my curiosity beyond all legitimate limits."

"I hold myself your Grace's humblest and most obliged servitor," responded the dwarf, with a low obeisance. "Would that I could prove my gratitude for the kindness testified by your Grace's manner and bearing towards one whom nature has rendered so little likely to awaken such generous interest in the hearts of his fellow-creatures!"

"I would fain know," said Margaret, "how it happened that your divining-rod in the first instance proved so uncertain and so faithless as to indicate a particular point where the treasure was buried,—and then led you more or less astray, compelling you to delve and dig in divers different points ere you settled upon the right one at last?"

"The art of divination, may it please your Majesty," returned Mompesson, "has its peculiarities and eccentricities, its difficulties and its intricacies, as well as any other art. Thus there are times when experiments fail in the hands of the most skilful chemists or under the treatment of the most subtle alchemist. So it is with the art to which my life has been devoted. But yet all those seeming eccentricities and real difficulties are a portion of the very rules which govern the art. For instance, inasmuch as my divining-rod first of all indicated one particular spot, and I was afterwards compelled to delve and dig in a dozen others, it may be regarded as a proof that there are several

treasures buried near and about this spot; so that they each and all became more or less a means of attraction for the divining-rod, and exercised from as many different points an influence over it."

"Ah!" ejaculated Margaret; "then think you that there are other treasures buried about this spot?"

"Such is the inference which I draw, gracious Queen," returned Mompesson, "from the eccentricity, if so I may term it, of the divining rod."

"You have not mentioned, methinks," said Margaret, "the country of your birth?"

"Ah, gracious Queen!" said the dwarf, shaking his head and speaking in a mournful tone,—“can you not conceive how the authors of the being of such an unsightly wretch as myself, were by no means anxious to acknowledge the parentage—that they ignored their offspring—and that brought up by strangers in a foreign land, I have since been a wanderer throughout all climes, but a settled resident in none. Yes—and it is thus too that I am acquainted with many languages—”

"Enough!" said the Queen. "Pardon me, sir stranger, if I touched upon a topic that is painful. My chief purpose was so to turn the discourse as to afford me the opportunity of observing that if it suit your views to continue your researches after the hidden treasures in Glen Urquhart, you have my free permission. But that is not all. You have deported yourself with honesty, and candour, and frankness, towards me; and therefore if it please you to tarry awhile in these parts, you are at liberty to make your home beneath the roof where you behold yon banner waving. Do this, worthy dwarf—and inasmuch as at my caprice Glen Urquhart furnished a cave as your abiding-place, we will see whether Castle Urquhart may not yield you more comfortable quarters."

Mompesson fell upon his knees and said, "Gracious Queen, I accept with unfeigned gratitude this distinguished mark of your royal favour. It will indeed please me well to prosecute in due season my researches throughout a district where, according to all indications, there must be considerable treasures buried. But yet not for the present, noble lady, dare I resume these investigations! There are influences which make themselves felt, either as impulses or as checks—the one follows close upon the heels of the other—and the power of divination experiences intervals of languor as well as of strength. This is a wise provision of heaven, in order to prevent the votary of the art from prosecuting it with an intense greediness of riches."

"Rest from your searches as long as you may think fit—or prosecute them as speedily as you may be enabled—it is the same to me!" answered Margaret. "Beneath the roof of Castle Urquhart you shall be your own master; and therefore you need not fear to accept of the free quarters which are so cordially offered for your use."

The dwarf again expressed his gratitude for the kindness which Queen Margaret was demonstrating towards him; and the royal cavalcade then quickly took its departure. About an hour afterwards, the warden Beattie again passed along the glen: he was on horseback—and he led by the bridle the sorry steed about which Mompesson had affected to show so much solicitude, and which had been so well cared for in the royal stables of Urquhart Castle. The dwarf was quite ready to accompany Beattie to that palatial residence; and thither he accordingly proceeded, bearing with him his valise of necessities and his vase of treasure.

Before we pursue the thread of our narrative, we will avail ourselves of this opportunity to place on record a few particulars which will fill up a gap

that would otherwise be left. The dwarf, be it remembered, had made a calculation to the effect that it would occupy exactly eight days for him to accomplish the journey to Carlisle and back; but so expeditiously did he proceed—so numerous were the favouring circumstances attending his progress—that it was but little more than seven days which he took in carrying out his purpose. After that interval of absence he returned to the mysterious caverns. Everything had taken place just as he had foreseen. Each day was marked by the presence of a basket containing a liberal supply of provender:—as many days as he had been absent, so many baskets were there, all lying upon the grass which he had strown thickly in the neighbourhood of the wheel. Noiselessly each successive basket had there fallen after each successive visit of Beattie; and the dwarf knew that his design had succeeded to the utmost. And then another fortuitous circumstance wonderfully favoured him. It was his original intention to have made use of the large sum of money which he had received from the Countess of Morton, as the means of vindicating his pretences to the possession of powers of divination; and he would have been ready with some excuse to account for the paucity of the amount. But mark what happened! Immediately on his return from that long and rapidly-accomplished journey, he as a matter of prudence addressed himself to the task of taking down the mechanism which he had arranged for the purpose of disposing of the baskets of provender:—he replaced the little shelf or ledge against the lower part of the aperture where he had originally fixed it in the presence of the royal cavalcade. But it was while he was reconsigning his wheel and the rest of his mechanism to the cavern beneath, that he made a discovery which most essentially served him. Beneath a mouldering heap of garments he found a large vase concealed; and this jar proved to be full of coins and the silver ornaments which were used on the altars of chapels. Here was a perfect godsend to Mompesson: the ready means were thus furnished of carrying out with indubitable success the trickery which he had commenced. The reader may understand the rest—he buried the vase at the bottom of the pit which he dug in the uppermost cavern; and we have seen how all his aims were crowned with triumph. He—the hideous, ill-shapen, distorted imp, who under ordinary circumstances would only have excited a sensation of loathing and disgust if he had presented himself to the Queen, and who would have been spurned instead of flattered—had contrived to win the royal favour, and to insinuate himself into the graces of the illustrious lady whose service he only sought to enter for the purpose of betraying her.

Before concluding this chapter, we must waft the attention of the reader from the picturesque Glen of Urquhart in Inverness-shire, to a spot the name of which is hallowed by many memories. Situated on the northern bank of the Tweed, at no great distance from Melrose, stood Dryburgh Abbey. The traveller who now seeks its ruins, finds that but little remains of the ancient structure,—only a small portion of the walls; but these remnants of the once stately pile are carefully preserved. If contemplated in the summer-time, the grey ruins are thrown out into relief by the rich green of the groves and orchards which form as it were a background of verdure;—and if viewed in the middle of winter, those same ruins appear to harmonise only too fitly with the devastation of nature itself. Hill, wood, and water there combine to render the scenery exquisitely beautiful in the former season—or to enhance its gloom in the latter. The Tweed

winds its pellucid way when the Summer sun smiles brightly upon it; or it rolls its turbid tide when Winter speaks in all its hollow accents and denuded Nature reclines shivering on her turfless bed.

But at the time of which we are writing, all was beauty and 'rightness on that spot where the two counties of Berwick and Roxburgh joined. The stately Abbey reared its proud towers upon the bank of the river: it was dedicated to the service of St. Mary; and a numerous brotherhood of holy friars dwelt within its walls. Here King David was then sojourning; for the worthy Abbot of Dryburgh was wont to retain a suite of apartments expressly for the royal use, in the same way that we have already described the practice as prevailing at Holyrood in Edinburgh or at the Monastery of Dalkeith. The King was now opening negotiations with the English authorities for a permanent peace; and Dryburgh Abbey was conveniently near the border of the two countries, so that a rapid exchange of couriers might be maintained between that place and the Lords-Warden of the English Marches, with whom the initiatory negotiations were being carried on. And then too, Dryburgh was only about twenty miles from Dalkeith; so that the King might at any time pay a flying visit to the handsome but profligate woman who was again weaving the meshes of her guileful fascinations around him.

One morning—just about the date of the incidents which we have been mentioning in this chapter—a horseman who had evidently ridden fast along the dusty road and beneath the sultry beams of the midsummer sun, sprang from the back of his panting animal at the gate of Dryburgh Abbey. He requested an immediate audience of the King. This was granted; and when the applicant entered the apartment where David was prepared to receive him, he was immediately recognised as the steward of Dalkeith Castle.

"What! Lockyer?" exclaimed the Monarch. "Has aught unpleasant happened?—for by the evidences of the speed wherewith you have journeyed—"

"Sire," returned the steward, "her ladyship bade me set off to seek your Majesty at once; for a messenger has arrived from Carlisle—"

"Arrived where?" cried David. "Do you mean at Dalkeith?"

"Yes, sire," rejoined Lockyer. "That messenger was the bearer of intelligence the most startling—"

"In the name of all the saints, man! tell me what you mean!" ejaculated the King. "Doubtless it concerns the Earl of Morton?"

"Yes, sire—most fatally concerns him," proceeded Lockyer. "The Earl is no more!"

"No more? Ha! say you so?" cried David.

"Yes, sire: the Earl of Morton is no more!" repeated Lockyer, with an emphasis which he thought fit to invest with an expression of sorrow—doubtless for the sake of appearances: "and there is much mystery attending the mode of his death. Either by the hand of self-destruction—or else by that of stealthy midnight murder—"

"Good heavens! is this so?" exclaimed the King. "Alas! the Earl was ever a faithful adherent of mine—But tell me!" he thus suddenly interrupted himself, "what tidings have you of this event?"

"The explanation is soon given, sire," answered Lockyer. "It appears that his lordship slept in a room situated at the end of a passage leading from an ante-chamber occupied by three confidential pages. No one could possibly reach the Earl's room except by previously passing through the chamber of the pages—unless indeed some stealthy assassin contrived to clamber up the outer

wall of the house and thus effected an entry into the Earl's apartment by the window."

"And is this suspected?" inquired the King.

"It would appear, sire," answered Lockyer, "as if no one knows whom to suspect or what conjecture to form. All is bewilderment, horror, and consternation within the walls of that mansion near Carlisle! The unfortunate Earl was found in the morning a corpse in his bed—a dagger was planted in his breast—and his right hand rested upon that dagger!"

"Ah! then it must have been suicide!" ejaculated the King.

"Unless, sire," rejoined Lockyer, "it were murder—and the murderer so played his lordship's hand as to produce the impression that it was a case of self-destruction!"

"But the pages?" said the King. "Is there the slightest ground—"

"Scarcely a ground for suspecting them, sire," answered Lockyer; "for they were of tried fidelity—though of course it is quite possible—for there is so much deception in the world—and moreover, one of them might have done the deed while his two companions slept. But there is not the slightest trace to afford a clue!—not the faintest sign to indicate that a murderer stole in by the window, or that the hand of a page dealt the fatal blow."

"But the weapon itself?" said the King.

"The Earl's own dagger!" replied Lockyer.

"This is another circumstance which with some strengthens the impression of suicide; but with others it is taken for an indication of murder's dreadful work which seeks to conceal itself under the impression of such suicide."

"Ah! all this is terrible!" said the King. "And the Countess?"

"Her ladyship has already set off for Carlisle," answered Lockyer; "and she bade me lose no time in bringing your Majesty the sad intelligence."

"And sad indeed it is," said the King, as with a gratuity he dismissed Lockyer from his presence: and he spoke what he really felt at the instant, for his conscience was touched as he murmured to himself, "What if after all it were indeed a suicide!—what if the unfortunate Morton, incensed or humiliated at the suspicion of the renewal of Louisa's connexion with me, should have thus ended his days by his own desperate act?"

CHAPTER LXXV

DUNDONALD AND ROTHSAY CASTLES.

It will possibly be borne in mind that at the very opening of this tale we made some allusion to the Lord High Steward of Scotland. This great nobleman—who was David's kinsman—had governed the country in the capacity of Regent during the King's captivity of eleven years in England. After David's return to his native territory, the High Steward had mixed but little in public affairs: but retiring to his castle in Ayrshire, he seemed inclined to devote himself to the enjoyment of domestic happiness, in the bosom of his somewhat numerous family. Being David's nearest relative, he was the heir presumptive to the crown: it may therefore be easily supposed that he had viewed with little favour the King's marriage with Margaret Logie. He had continued to abide at his castle; but if on the one hand he had abstained from sending either messenger or letter to offer his congratulations to David on account of the matrimonial alliance he had formed, he had on the other hand been equally cautious in

avoiding the expression of an opinion on the point. David did not take any notice of his kinsman: he invited him not to Court—he made no overture to the effect that he was desirous his royal wife should become acquainted with the Stewart branch of the family. Thus the Lord High Steward and Queen Margaret had never met; and still in default of issue from David's marriage the Steward remained heir presumptive to the Scottish throne.

Dundonald Castle—which for many years past has been associated with the noble family of Cochrane—was at the period of which we are writing the palatial residence of the Lord High Steward. It had already been in existence two centuries: in extent it was spacious—in architecture it was of the wonted Gothic massiveness. The donjon or keep—instead of occupying a central position, as was usually the case with fortalices and castles of the feudal ages—was at the southern extremity of the enclosure. A portion of it still exists; and the traveller who visits the ruins, may judge from the three arched cells which will at once meet his view as the most conspicuous objects there, of what tremendous massive solidity were the foundations and outer walls of the once frowning donjon. On a portion of the western wall the arms of the Stewarts, and those of other powerful Scottish families with which that royal race intermarried, may still be discerned in their rude alto-relievo sculpturing: but time is rapidly obliterating the last traces thereof. The remnants of the walls now constituting the ruins of Dundonald Castle, define what the positions of the main buildings, in respect to the outer and inner-courts, formerly were; and it is by no means difficult to trace the lingering appearances of a vast rampart-mound which must have girt the entire fortalice. This exterior line of fortification was evidently protected by a moat encircling the base of the hill whereon the castle stood. Before closing this brief description of Dundonald Castle, we must add that it was celebrated for its spacious and beautiful chapel, dedicated to St. Ninian, and for the sacred service of which a choir of ecclesiastics was maintained, with a fixed endowment. But no trace indicative of even the site of that chapel is now to be discovered; and as for the endowment, it was otherwise appropriated at the period of the Reformation.

We have said that King David was sojourning for a brief space at Dryburgh Abbey, in order that he might with the greater rapidity and facility open negotiations with the Lord Wardens of the English Marches for the final settlement of the boundary betwixt the two countries. The adjustment of this question—which had so long been in dispute, and which had led to so many misunderstandings, conflicts, and heartburnings on the part of the dwellers, alike Scotch and English, along the Borders—was naturally considered to be the first step towards a sincere and permanent peace. The Lord-Wardens, as guardians and defenders of the English Border, were enabled to deal with that portion of the question with plenary powers. Thus the negotiations proceeded rapidly; and as the English Border noblemen themselves were wearied of warfare, they manifested a liberal disposition in drawing the boundary across the map,—neither insisting upon too much on their own side, nor refusing to admit the Scottish claims where they appeared just and reasonable in respect to the debateable lands.

In the meanwhile the English government had appointed Commissioners to repair to Scotland for the purpose of solemnly sanctioning the proceedings of the Lord-Wardens, and also for the purpose of settling the other conditions for a lasting peace. King David, by way of especially displaying his

favourable disposition towards England, had sent to intimate to these Commissioners that they were at liberty to fix their abode, during the negotiations, in any castle or town of Scotland which might be most pleasing to them. They were noblemen who had on some former occasion exercised diplomatic relations with Scotland during the time of the Regency; and they had received most unquestionable proofs of the sterling integrity and straightforward character of the Lord High Steward. They were therefore now resolved that the negotiations for a permanent peace should take place as much as possible under the auspices of "the Good Robert Stewart," as the Lord High Steward was generally called in a familiar manner; and they elected to take up their abode at Dundonald Castle. Their avowed reason was that the adhesion of the heir presumptive to the Scottish throne, to whatsoever conditions might be the result of the negotiation, was a matter of the most absolute necessity.

David was at first piqued at what he naturally conceived to be more or less a slight, if not absolutely an insult towards himself; but he was now too far committed to his peace-policy to be enabled to break off the negotiations. It was only by forming a bond of friendship with England that he could dispense with the Teutonic alliance, or that he could shake off the influence which Prince de Salza had succeeded in obtaining over the progress of Scotland's affairs. Therefore the consolidation of his peace-policy was necessary and indispensable for King David, ere he could seriously take measures for the execution of a purpose which was however already uppermost in his thoughts—namely, the divorce of Queen Margaret.

The King repaired to Dundonald Castle to meet the English Commissioners. His kinsman the Lord High Steward had made the most splendid preparations for the reception of the Monarch; and the bearing of the latter towards his kinsman and all the members of the Stewart family, was courteous, kind, and even affectionate. We have already seen that David was well versed in the dissimulating art of putting the best face upon matters: his pride would not suffer him to show by any sign that he considered himself to be slighted or insulted by the present proceeding of the English Commissioners; and his demeanour was such as to create the general impression that he gladly seized upon the present opportunity to take by the hand that kinsman from whom for a long time past he had been separated or estranged. Be it observed that Queen Margaret was not invited to Dundonald Castle: the Lord Steward mentioned not her name; and King David made not the slightest allusion unto her. She was, as it were, already ignored by him; and the very object of his present policy towards England was to leave himself free and unshackled to carry out his purpose of finally divorcing and discarding her.

Separated by the Frith of Clyde from the north-western shore of Ayrshire, is the Island of Bute. At the present day the most memorable object on that island is the noble ruin of a castle which at the period whereof we are writing was one of the most important in all Scotland. We allude to Rothesay,—which with its vast circular court flanked by four round towers—its huge donjon—and its immense main building projecting from betwixt two of the flanking towers—the whole surrounded by a wide deep moat,—combined great strength with the conveniences of accommodation. It was a palatial residence belonging to the Lord High Steward of Scotland; and to this personage was it indebted for many improvements alike as a fortalice and a habitation.

When a few weeks had been spent by the King

and the English Commissioners in the enjoyment of the hospitalities of the Lord Steward at Dundonald Castle, a temporary removal was made to the Isle of Bute; and there, within the walls of the palatial fortalice of Rothesay, did festivities, gaieties, and rejoicings of every description take place for a similar period. Many of Scotland's principal nobles were invited to meet the Monarch at what appeared to be a celebration of the renewal of a friendly understanding betwixt his Majesty and his kinsman. At length, at the expiration of about six weeks, the conditions for a permanent peace were finally arranged on the part of King David and the English Commissioners, with the full concurrence of the Lord High Steward. The Commissioners took their departure; and nothing now remained to be done on either side, except to exchange the ratifications of the treaty—which ceremony was to take place in London with the least possible delay, King David undertaking to send a plenipotentiary thither for the purpose.

David repaired to Edinburgh, where he temporarily established his quarters at Holyrood. Two months had elapsed since he had last seen the Countess of Morton; and it was therefore now verging towards the close of September when David one day received a billet, to the effect that the Countess had just returned to Dalkeith Castle, where she hoped soon to have the pleasure of greeting his Majesty. The King lost no time in proceeding thither; for he was full of anxiety to learn some additional particulars relative to the death of the Earl of Morton. He found Louisa appressed in a mourning garb, consisting of purple and black, according to the fashion of the age; and there were assuredly no traces of care upon her countenance. As handsome was she as when the King had last seen her a couple of months back; and he had not been many minutes in her presence, when he found himself mentally putting the query—"How is it that this woman exercises such a soft, insidious, yet nevertheless powerful influence over me? All my senses are enthralled by her looks!—her smiles fascinate me!—and the tones of her voice seem to sink down into the very depths of my heart!"

The fact is that the King was a libertine; and all that was voluptuous in the disposition of Louisa Morton—looking out of her, as it were, in her regards and in her smiles, and finding expression in the very tones of her voice—appealed to all that was sensuous in the disposition of the King. Far more perfect—far more magnificent was the beauty of Margaret,—that beauty which had for a brief space plunged the King's imagination into the inextricable maze of a ravishing dream: but the womanly dignity and proper pride of Margaret imparted to her looks and to her whole bearing a certain refinement—a delicacy and a modesty, which were utterly wanting on the part of Louisa Morton. Thus, such a disposition as David's was more calculated to be acted upon by the influences to which it was subject when in the presence of the Countess, than by the more transcending beauty and the chaster mien of his own wife.

"And now tell me, Louisa," said David, after the exchange of some tender expressions, "what learnt you at Carlisle?—how really perished your husband—by murder or by suicide?"

"It was by his own hand that he died," answered the Countess.

"Ah! by his own hand?" ejaculated the King, with a deep mournfulness of countenance. "If any conduct on my part, Louisa—I mean if aught that has taken place between you and me, should have entered into the causes or motives for this sad deed—"

"Tranquillise yourself on that head," interrupted the Countess. "No, no!—my husband suspected naught of all that! But let me reveal to you a secret which you are now to learn for the first time—"

"A secret?" asked the King: "what mean you, Louisa?"

"I mean this," she rejoined,—"that the unfortunate Earl was afflicted with a sore disease—an internal malady of some cancerous kind—which caused him to endure the most horrible agonies, and which of late years had rendered life a burden to him."

"Ah! was this so?" ejaculated the King, infinitely relieved by the assurances which had just fallen from Louisa's lips, and the truth of which he could not now for an instant suspect.

"It is as I tell you, sire," answers the Countess: "there can be no doubt that physical pain goaded my husband to suicide! The best proof that he entertained no ill-will against myself is to be found in the fact that he bequeathed me all his possessions."

"So that you are now mistress of Dalkeith?" interjected the Monarch.

"Yes, sire: and were it not for the necessity of sustaining seemingly appearances under existing circumstances, I would offer that my two beautiful harpists should beguile the time for your Grace—"

"Think not, dear Louisa," he interrupted her, "that there is any necessity for adventitious aids to beguile the time when I am in your presence. Besides, we have much to talk about!"

"Yes—much," said the Countess. "You, sire, have been speedy in carrying out the policy on which you had resolved some three months back."

"Yes," observed David: "when once I have resolved to pursue a particular course I do not linger on the way. That which was virtually nothing more than an armistice of eighteen years—a prolonged suspension of arms—has now taken the character of a veritable treaty of peace."

"And from all reports which have reached my ears," continued the Countess, "your Grace is now on excellent terms with your noble kinsman, the Lord High Steward?"

"Even so," said the King. "Doubtless Margaret is in her heart bitterly chagrined at this reconciliation; for she has no reason to regard my kinsman Robert lovingly, seeing and considering that he has never offered his congratulations on our marriage."

"Have you not met the Queen, sire," asked the Countess, "during my absence at Carlisle?"

"No—not once," returned David. "I have written to her—but only one letter; and that was briefly conceived. I do not choose to break with her all in a moment—"

"No—assuredly not, sire!" exclaimed the Countess of Morton: "you must act with your accustomed wariness, and do nothing to show that there is any fault on your own side. Perhaps you can tell me how matters progress at Urquhart Castle?"

"Have you received no communication from that beautiful page of yours," asked the King, with a smile, "since you despatched him upon his errand?"

"No communication," responded the Countess. "Indeed, I am in complete ignorance of the success—if any—which he may have experienced; though I naturally argue that he has not totally failed in his object, inasmuch as he continues absent."

"Well then, Louisa," said the King, "I can furnish you with some intelligence on the point. Lady Galbraith has communicated with me frequently and secretly—Ah! by the bye, is it not strange that

she should have conceived an indescribable hatred for your pretty page Mompesson?—and yet she little suspects that they are both as it were rowing in the same boat."

"Then the dwarf has succeeded," said the Countess, "in obtaining admission into Urquhart Castle?"

"He has not only succeeded," answered the King, "in obtaining a footing in the Castle—but he is even treated with a certain degree of distinction, or at least with respect. He performed some juggling trick—as I have no doubt it veritably was, though Margaret and all her Court believe that it was genuine and truthful—and Lady Galbraith herself confesses that she cannot altogether disbelieve—"

"Ah, sire!" ejaculated the Countess with a smile of triumph upon her features, "did I not tell you that the dwarf possesses an intelligence which well compensates him for his hideous physical ugliness? Rest assured, sire, that he will yet succeed in doing more in a few months than all your Lady Galbraiths could accomplish in as many years! But what thinks the Queen of this peace-policy which has the effect of emancipating your Grace from all Teutonic influences?"

"Margaret is wary and cunning, my dear Louisa. She is pursuing a neutral policy; and she will proffer no opinion upon the course which I am adopting. Lady Galbraith writes me word that Margaret is cunning and evasive. But Ah! now that I bethink me, there was a point where Margaret could not with equal ease draw a veil over the nature of her thoughts: for when the name of the Earl of Bassentyne was mentioned in her hearing, the colour deepened on her cheeks with a tell-tale glow. By St. Andrew! Louisa, if I caught her tripping—or if by any means that young Earl could possibly be thrown in her way—"

But the King stopped short,—for there were moments when he was shocked and ashamed to admit even unto himself that he was capable of such villainous ideas in respect to Margaret. This was one of those moments; and turning away from the Countess of Morton, he paced to and fro with hurried and uneven steps.

"He is not changed! and he will divorce her!" mentally ejaculated the vile treacherous Louisa. "Somewhat weak of purpose is he at times; but I will keep him to the mark! Yes, yes! the knell of Margaret's doom must soon ring; and its sounds shall serve as a wedding peal for me! The heart of David is enthralled—I have cast spells upon his mind—every chance is in my favour—and Mompesson, who has served me so well in one instance, will not fail to strike some grand blow, or avail himself of some opportunity, to do all the rest that is required!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

WE must now return to Castle Urquhart. Two months had elapsed since Mompesson became installed there; and though he had not renewed his experiments in the art of divination, yet he had not neglected other means of establishing an influence over the minds of those with whom he came in contact. Though naturally malignant, peevish, spiteful, and ill-tempered, as all dwarfs invariably are,—yet with a consummate art of hypocrisy he concealed all these defects of character and disposition, and gained for himself the reputation of being the most good-natured, obliging, kind-hearted little fellow that ever existed. He had no pride; and it

mattered not who required a service to be done, so long as he could render it. If one of the Court ladies fancied a *bouquet* of flowers, and if the wish were expressed in Mompesson's hearing, he would rush off into the glen and return presently with a posy of the most charming specimens of floral beauty. If he happened to be loitering near the domestic offices, and heard the head cook intimate a desire for some particular herb, away would the dwarf rush; and however scarce the herb might be in Glen Urquhart, he would be sure to find it. If a page or a damsel wished to write to some relation or lover residing at a distance, and if their skill in the calligraphic art were not equal to the task,—there was Mompesson ready to accomplish it; and so discreet, that any secret might be entrusted to him—for he was one who would perish sooner than be guilty of a breach of confidence!

At least, such was the character which he succeeded in establishing for himself: he was ever on the watch for the opportunity either to render a service or to prove his sincerity: and in a very short time he was liked by every individual within the walls of Urquhart Castle,—Lady Galbraith only excepted. But her ladyship was a woman of strong antipathies, as all unprincipled persons are; and from the very first moment she had a hatred for Mompesson.

One day,—at the expiration of about a couple of months after the dwarf had first taken up his quarters at the castle—Queen Margaret was informed by Marion Galbraith, the lady-in-waiting who was on duty at the time, that a person having the air of a Highland chief, craved an audience of her Majesty. The Queen—who was in her own private cabinet, or *boudoir*, as in modern parlance we should term it, and who had just risen from the front of a *prie-dieu* where she had been offering up her devotions—demanded the name of this Highland chief who sought her presence.

"May it please your Grace," replied Marion, "I received the message from one of the pages in waiting: I have delivered it precisely as it was delivered to me; and I have not even so much as seen the personage himself."

"No one, my dear Marion," said Margaret, firmly yet kindly, "can ever be permitted to enter unnamed into my presence. Yet some of the Highland chiefs are so uncouth as to be ignorant of the niceties of these points of Court custom. We will not therefore offend or stand the chance of offending an applicant who may perhaps be honest-minded and well-meaning. Go, my dear Marion, and learn his name."

The young lady accordingly quitted the private apartment of her royal mistress; and she proceeded to the waiting-room, where she expected to find a page through whose medium she might elicit the desired information. But the page on duty had stepped out for a few moments; and the applicant for the interview with the Queen was there alone. It immediately struck Marion Galbraith that she had seen him before—though she could not recollect where. There was a certain freedom and independence in his manner and speech which somewhat disgusted the young lady; and she returned to the royal apartment, murmuring to herself, "I wonder who he can possibly be!"

"Now, my dear Marion," said the Queen, "you are doubtless in a condition to proclaim the title of the personage who desires admittance into my presence?"

"On the contrary, gracious lady," answered Marion; "the stranger refuses to give his name—he says that it is useless—but that he knows your Majesty will receive him—"

"I receive him in such sort as this?" exclaimed Margaret, proudly and indignantly. "What suite comes he attended with?"

"He is altogether unattended, your Grace," replied Marion. "But he says that if I merely whisper in your Majesty's ear—Pardon me, gracious lady—the insolence is all his own—"

"Of that I am full sure, dear Marion!" exclaimed the Queen. "What says he?—that if you do but whisper in my ear—"

"Yes, gracious lady," resumed Marion; "it I whisper in your royal ear, to the effect that he was present with Father Julius and Lieutenant Redman on a certain memorable occasion—"

"Stephen Cochrane!" ejaculated Margaret: "is it possible?"

"Ah! 'tis he!" cried Marion. "Methought he was not altogether a stranger to me! I saw him once or twice in my poor father's time, at the Castle of the Bass Rock."

"And it is Stephen Cochrane who now seeks an interview with me?" said Margaret, slowly revolving in her mind whether she ought or ought not to grant the interview. "It is true," she continued, in a low musing strain, "that I am under obligations to him: it is likewise true that he was handsomely rewarded at the time. And Ah! have I not heard something which militates against his character? Yes! yes! I remember! He grossly plundered the French noblemen in London, by obtaining from them funds with the declaration that they were to be appropriated to the King's use! No! I cannot see him! But Ah! said he aught more, Marion," demanded the Queen, turning towards the young lady, "than you have just now stated?"

"Yes, may it please your Highness," responded Lady Galbraith's daughter, hesitatingly and diffidently. "He said that he had enjoyed the honour of acting at one time as your Grace's special messenger—with regard to a missive—to—to—the Earl of Bassentyne—"

Here Marion blushed and grew more and more confused; and Margaret fancied that it was because the young lady felt that she was treading on delicate ground while repeating this portion of the message whereof she was the bearer.

"I will see this Stephen Cochrane," said the Queen: and then she murmured to herself, "He is one to whom I ought not to prove ungrateful;—and as for his transactions with the French noblemen in London, who knows but that he may be enabled to explain them satisfactorily?"

Marion Galbraith again withdrew from the Queen's apartment; and in a few minutes she returned, introducing Stephen Cochrane. Margaret made a sign to intimate that she desired to be alone with this man; and Marion retired into an adjoining ante-chamber. Cochrane was dressed in Highland costume: a huge claymore, with its immense basket-hilt, was suspended to his side; and a single eagle's feather decorated his cap. He had some few ornaments of jewellery; his raiment was good; but his mien was that of a dissipated and profligate individual; while there was a bold insolence in his regards and a certain swaggering independence in his gait. All those details were discerned by Margaret at the first rapid glance which she threw at the man; and at once drawing herself up with dignity, she inquired, "What would you, Master Cochrane, with me?"

"In the first place," was the man's response, "methought that I should like to see once more the lady whom I helped to a crown and sceptre, and therewith the titles of Grace, Highness, and Majesty;—and in the second place I felt assured that this same lady would not prove unmindful of an old

friend who now stands in need of her gracious succour."

"Tell me in what manner I can serve you," said Margaret; "and if your requests be reasonable and fair, they shall not be made in vain. But be hasty—for doubtless you have been recognised by some of the persons belonging to the castle—"

"Ah! then, your Majesty considers that it is dangerous for me to show myself openly?"

"Unless you can explain in a satisfactory and honourable manner," rejoined the Queen, "the affair with the French noblemen—"

"A mere trifle, great lady," interjected Stephen Cochrane flippantly,—“and one which is barely worth talking of.”

"You are wrong, sir," answered Margaret, severely. "The King is irate against you: or it was by making use of his name that you accomplished the fraud—as I am now bound to regard it, seeing that you have no proper exculpation to offer."

"But the King does not happen to be here," said Cochrane; "and even if he were, I should trust to your Majesty's power and influence to save me from your royal husband's ire. At all events my situation having become more or less unsettled and pressing, I deemed it expedient at all risks to seek your Majesty."

"In what sense is your situation pressing?" added the Queen. "You wear the garb of a Highland chief—"

"For some twelvemonths past," replied Cochrane, "I have sojourned with the Lord of the Isles, who is a kinsman of mine, and to whose clan I belong. He is not well affected towards your royal husband; and he therefore all the more willingly gave his countenance to me. As for the tale about the French noblemen in London, that is by no means generally known, and my repute has not suffered largely or widely on that account. But the Lord of the Isles,—taking it for granted that I had been expelled from the King's service on account of the aid which I lent to your gracious Majesty during the memorable proceedings at Dumbarton Castle, upwards of three years ago—granted me his favour and gave me his friendship. In short, he treated me with the kindness which a noble highly placed may well accord unto a poor kinsman; and he made me the captain of one of his island castles."

"Being therefore in such good favour with so potent a chief," said Queen Margaret, "how is it, Master Cochrane, that you now stand in need of any service at my hands?"

"Alas! gracious lady," replied Cochrane, "fortune seems for some time past to have taken a most decided turn against me. No sooner do I seem to be floating for a while on the smooth bright waters of prosperity, when the storm arises and my bark is upset. Thus in London the gaming-table devoured all that I received from his Highness Prince de Salza, and all that by the artfulness of my diplomacy I succeeded in obtaining from the French noblemen. I next visited Paris—"

"I crave not a knowledge of the various adventures through which you may have passed," said the Queen. "Be pleased to arrive speedily at the point."

"It shall be so, great lady," answered Cochrane. "Well then, your Grace was inquiring how it befalls that I need your urgent succour at the present time? Simply because I have lost the favour of my noble kinsman the Lord of the Isles. He is a great chief, but mean and close in pecuniary affairs; so that he the other day took it into his head to inquire somewhat minutely into the manner in which certain sums had been disposed of by me; and I, thinking it beneath my dignity to give such explanations, took my departure forthwith—"

"Enough, sir," said Margaret, again speaking severely, and almost sternly; for though Cochrane's manner was far from being disrespectful, yet there was a certain tincture of flippant familiarity and levity which made it almost insulting. "I understand," continued the Queen: "you have by your misdeeds forfeited the friendship of your noble kinsman—you have fled precipitately from the Isles—and you have come to seek succour at my hands. That succour you shall receive; and it shall likewise be liberally afforded,—but with the thorough understanding that you forthwith depart hence, and that in the least possible space of time you leave the Scottish territory. On these terms a sum of gold shall be given you—"

"Thanks, gracious Queen," interrupted Cochrane; "but this is just precisely the species of favour which I would not receive—and which, indeed, is calculated to do me more harm than good. Nay, frown not, great Queen!—but listen, I beseech you. The truth is, I have not the knack on keeping money. Your misers, your hoarders, and your provident ones may do this: but it is a task beyond the capacities of Stephen Cochrane. If your Grace were to give me twenty thousand marks to-day, it would be but a question of time how soon they should take wing and vanish;—and then, behold! my position would be more deplorable than ever. Your Highness perceives that I comprehend the weakness of my character and the fallibility of my disposition: I therefore know what is good for me—and that is, a situation of permanence and honour with respectable emoluments paid at brief intervals and with due regularity. In short, I am tired of knocking about the world: I love my native Scotland—and it is my fervid wish to settle down on Caledonian soil, in some comfortable situation of the nature that I have described."

"It is impossible, Master Cochrane," answered the Queen, "that I can serve you in this respect. Can you not well understand that the King cherishes no very loving feelings towards you—"

"But your Majesty," interrupted Cochrane, "will protect me with your royal favour and countenance; and inasmuch as rumour declares that the matrimony to which I had the honour of helping you, is a happy one, and that your influence is all-powerful with your royal husband—"

"Stop, sir!" ejaculated Margaret; "these are subjects which it were unseemly for you and me to discuss. I tell you that I cannot assist you in the manner which you point out: I tell you moreover that you incur the greatest danger by appearing publicly in Scotland—that the King would unhesitatingly command your arrest—"

"Pardon me, gracious Queen," said Cochrane; "but methinks that I am entitled to some consideration at your hands. It is not every one who can help a lady to a sceptre and a crown: it is not every one who would have proved faithless to a royal master in order to promote the interests of the lady whom he was wooing. By serving your Majesty, I lost my own position—I sacrificed everything."

"This is true, Master Cochrane," said the Queen, in a kind and conciliatory tone; "and I am ready and willing to prove my gratitude. But it must be in the manner which I have indicated."

"Then it is no favour nor boon which your Highness is conferring," said Cochrane, doggedly. "Serve me after my own fashion; for I know that you have the power and you have the influence."

"I have not, Master Cochrane!" cried the Queen emphatically. "I have not!—and I never had! This is the solemn truth. For three years certain appearances were maintained before the



world: the world therefore thought that the alliance of King David with Margaret Logie was a happy one. But the world is already beginning to entertain its suspicions—to open its eyes—and to become disabused. The King concludes a permanent peace with England: he renounces his long-cherished idea of avenging Nevill's Cross; and therefore he no longer needs the aid of Prince de Salza and the Teutonic knights. Understand you not, Master Cochrane,—you who obtained so deep an insight into so many things three years back,—understand you not that at the moment when King David adopted a course which obviated the necessity of cherishing the favourable feelings of Prince de Salza, he at the same time destroyed the necessity of maintaining a smiling demeanour towards me? And have you not heard how he has given the hand of friendship to his kinsman Robert the Lord High Steward?—that kinsman by whom I have never been recognised! Is not this a blow which my royal husband is levelling against myself? And yet," added the Queen bitterly, "you speak of the power and influence which I exercise over him!"

"In those semi-barbarian western isles one hears nothing that passes amidst the civilization of the main-land," replied Stephen Cochrane; "and therefore your Grace is telling me things which are novel and startling. But if your Highness compels me to speak out plainly, I am bound to add that methinks your Grace must have exaggerated the picture."

"Ah! these words to me?" cried Margaret, her superb countenance flashing with indignation.

"Yes—these words to you, Queen of Scotland," returned Cochrane; "because I see that you are ungrateful—and because in this ingratitude of yours you are having recourse to subterfuges."

"Cease, insolent one!" exclaimed Margaret; "or, as I am a crowned Queen and a living woman, I will give you into the custody of those who will know how to chastise you fitly for this impertinence!"

"Ah! then, you force me to speak out plainly," said Cochrane, with a smile of cool insolent defiance upon his lips; and leaning in a free and easy manner upon the high back of a velvet-covered arm-chair, he looked the Queen steadily in the face,—saying, "I now mean to dictate, where, if you had permitted me, I should have humbly entreated and respectfully implored. Your Majesty is more in my power than you seem to think!"

The Queen started: her countenance again grew crimson—angry words rose to the very brim of her lips—but she held them back, for she thought she had better hear what the fellow had to say ere she provoked or defied him.

"Could you think," continued Cochrane, "that when I was helping you to a crown, I was unmindful of my own interests?—or could you possibly suppose that my conduct was utterly disinterested and unselfish? Nothing of the sort! The King bade me procure a mock priest; and if I had done so I should have retained his favour. But in what sense was it that I reasoned with myself? I said in mental deliberation, 'To whom can I render the greater service? on whom can I establish the larger claim of gratitude? at whose hands may I eventually hope to receive the greater amount of benefits?'—These questions I put to myself at the time: and I came to the conclusion that it were advisable to decide on espousing *your* cause and helping you to ascend the throne. And perhaps to this decision I was the more impelled because I had you in my power."

"Those words again?" ejaculated Margaret, with mingled anger and anxiety.

"Yes—those words again," replied Cochrane.

"Just now you said that I at the time had obtained an insight into so many things—and you spoke truly! Did I not know, for instance, that rings had been exchanged between yourself and a certain Earl?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Margaret: "but those rings were mutually restored!"

"Think you so?" asked Cochrane, with a peculiar malignity of smile, and with a reptile gleaming of the eyes. "True! the ring which *you* gave the Earl of Bassentyne, was restored to your Grace."

"And the ring which *he* gave to me?" interjected Margaret, who was now labouring under a strong and increasing agitation,—“that ring, I say, which Roland of Bassentyne had placed on my finger—did I not enclose it in a letter which I sealed with wax and fastened with a silken string, and whereof you yourself were the bearer—”

"Full well do I remember the incident to which your Grace alludes," interrupted Stephen Cochrane; "for was it not I myself who recommended you to pen that letter?"

"True!" cried the Queen, again giving a sudden start of poignant anxiety. "And—and—you delivered it?"

"I was not such a fool," rejoined Cochrane. "No! no!"

"Am I to understand," demanded Margaret, her eyes flashing fire,—“am I to understand—”

"Your Grace is to understand," rejoined Cochrane, with a look and tone of calm defiance, "that the letter and the ring are still in my possession! How else should I have had your Grace in my power? how else should I have established a hold upon you? And was I not right? You see that if I had trusted to your sense of gratitude only, I should have leant upon a rotten reed; and therefore 'tis well that I took the precaution which I did take!"

"And you perpetrated this infamy?" said Margaret, in a hollow voice and with a pale countenance, as she clasped her hands with a degree of anguish which she could not help betraying.

"Certainly, I did it!" answered Cochrane. "And that letter proves how the King wooed at the time a lady who had just plighted her troth most solemnly and sacredly to another—"

"Enough! speak not of it!" exclaimed Margaret. "But—but—"

"One word more, if you please, gracious Queen," said Cochrane. "It is my impression that your power and influence are great with the King; and therefore I insist that my pardon be obtained at his hands. But if otherwise—if, I mean, it be really true that he harbours ill-feelings towards your Grace,—why, *then* it becomes all the more important to your Majesty to regain possession of this letter and ring. For if circumstances compel me to throw myself at his feet, reveal everything to him, and prove my statements by the production of the said letter and ring—"

"You would not do it!" exclaimed Margaret: "it were the veriest wickedness! Nay, more—it were the completest madness!"

"Impetuous words, gracious lady," interrupted Cochrane, "constitute no argument. Rest assured that if I chose to take a hostile part against you, I should not stand alone—I should not want for allies—the Earl of Bassentyne himself—"

"Ah! say you so?" exclaimed the Queen. "No! no! Roland of Bassentyne would never—"

"Be not too sure!" said Cochrane, with a significant look. "Perhaps I know more of what the Earl of Bassentyne thinks and of what he would be prepared to do, than your Grace imagines. However, let us settle our differences amicably, if

we can; and I will give your Highness a proof of my own readiness on that score. I will take it for granted that your Grace has not the power nor the influence to set me right with the King; and therefore I must stipulate that your Highness will do the next best thing on my behalf."

"Speak! speak! what is it?" exclaimed Margaret eagerly.

"Give me ten thousand marks for my present needs," continued Cochrane; "and make some arrangement whereby a suitable pension shall be annually paid unto me, by some respectable goldsmith or money-broker in London—to which capital I must e'en perforce return—"

"Ten thousand marks!" ejaculated the Queen. "Whence can I procure such a sum? And for me to make you my pensioner! Good heavens! it is monstrous!"—for Margaret at one glance beheld all the danger and inconvenience that might arise from such a step, and how it would indeed be furnishing scope for the tongue of scandal to make its own comments.

"Your Grace now knows my terms," said Cochrane doggedly; "and I shall not depart from them. But I am not altogether unreasonable: I will give your Majesty time to settle everything in a convenient and leisurely manner. This day fortnight I will return to Glen Urquhart; and lest there should be any peril or impropriety in my revisiting the castle, I will be in the midst of yonder grove overhanging Loch Ness, precisely at noon."

With these words Stephen Cochrane bowed, and issued abruptly from the apartment, as if he were inexorable in reference to the stipulations he had laid down and did not choose to argue the point any further.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

MARION GALBRAITH.

It was in no enviable state of mind that Queen Margaret was left by Stephen Cochrane. She fancied that she was in the power of a man of desperate character, and who was determined to rebuild his own ruined fortunes at her cost. The treacherous game he had played in reference to the letter and the ring she had entrusted to him to be delivered to the Earl of Bassentyne, showed that he was capable of any villany. There was confusion as well as agitation in Margaret's thoughts; and as she reviewed the various points which had been touched upon during the interview with Cochrane, she became more and more bewildered how to clear up the mysteries which they involved.

"In what manner could Stephen Cochrane have dealt with Roland at the time?" she asked herself: "how was it that he obtained from Roland the ring which I had given that young noble in exchange for his own? And now the villain tells me that Roland himself is ready to turn against me! Can this be possible? Yes, yes—it may be!—for how do I know what falsehoods Cochrane may have told Roland at the time? And then too, there was the imprisonment which Roland endured in the Castle of the Bass Rock; and though subsequently his conduct towards me was so generous, alike in the oratory at Dalkeith and during the proceedings at Dumbarton, yet who can tell how reflection may have altered his sentiments—how meditation over his wrongs may have embittered his soul against me? Would that I could see him!—would that for only a brief five minutes we might be together, that everything should be explained and all that is mysterious should be cleared up!"

Margaret now felt the want of a sincere friend and confidante. During the three years and some months of her married life, she had never breathed to her brother Lord Liddesdale—nor to her old friend and benefactor, the Earl of Caithness—no, nor yet to Albertina, whom she loved as if she were a sister—she had never breathed to a single soul the tale of her unhappiness as a wife. Her pride had prevented her: and thus, now that she began to find difficulties growing up around her, she was at a loss how to act. At first she thought of sending without delay to fetch her brother, that she might reveal everything to him and take his counsel on the subject: but here again her pride stepped in, and she mentally ejaculated, "No!—never, never could I confess to having thus played so vile a part at the time to his friend Roland of Bassentyne!"

For the same reason she could not unbosom herself to her sister-in-law Albertina; nor to the Earl of Caithness—and she felt that she was thrown entirely on her own resources. She could not blind herself to the fact that the King's policy was changing in a manner which was calculated to leave her entirely at his mercy, and deprive her as it were of the influence of Prince de Salza's protection; and she therefore saw the necessity of being more than ever circumspect in her conduct. Yes—and not only was it required to be prudent and guarded in her present proceedings, but it was equally important to neutralize any antecedent circumstances which could be laid hold of as a handle against her. Hence the absolute necessity of getting back from Stephen Cochrane a letter which, in her own handwriting and with her own signature, would prove that almost at the very period when she accepted the overture of the King's love and suffered him to believe that she loved him in return, she had been exchanging rings with another! It is true that David had entertained an idea at the time that the Earl of Bassentyne was endeavouring to render his addresses acceptable to Margaret, and he had therefore caused him to be imprisoned to get rid of the possibility of rivalry: but the King had never known, and was very far from dreaming, that matters had gone to such a length betwixt Margaret and the young Earl as the exchange of rings in token of solemn engagement and sacred betrothal. Should this fact now come to David's knowledge, it might be used as a weapon against her: it might serve as the means of an open and direct persecution the issue of which she shuddered to contemplate!

All these reflections passed through the troubled mind of Margaret after Stephen Cochrane had taken his departure; and she came to the conclusion that it was absolutely necessary for her to get back the letter and the ring from the possession of that desperate villain—and also to come to a full explanation with Roland of Bassentyne, so as to disarm him if he were indeed inclined to prove hostile towards her. In respect to Cochrane she had a fortnight's grace—a reprieve of two whole weeks ere it was necessary to meet that man again; and in the meanwhile it would be most desirable to ascertain what had been the real tenour of his conduct towards the Earl of Bassentyne, when acting, or pretending to act, on Margaret's behalf upwards of three years ago. But how could she convey a message to the Earl of Bassentyne? how cause her wish to be intimated that she desired a private interview with him at Urquhart Castle? As for penning a billet, it was out of the question; for if he were indeed her enemy, such an incautious proceeding would only be placing herself more completely than ever in his power.

While Margaret was absorbed in deep thought, and giving way to her sorrowful reflections, Marion

Galbraith softly re-entered the room; for half-an-hour had by this time elapsed since the departure of Stephen Cochrane, and the young lady was surprised that the Queen should remain so long alone. Indeed, she had feared from the tone, the language, and the appearance of Stephen Cochrane that his visit was not altogether one which would afford Margaret pleasure, but that on the contrary, it was an infliction with which her Majesty would have gladly dispensed.

On hearing a soft footfall on the carpet near, Margaret raised her head and beheld Marion Galbraith. There was something more than melancholy in the Queen's countenance—something that was even of a care-worn expression—worn-begone and haggard—as if during the last hour the royal lady had suffered acutely and deeply. Marion was shocked; she endeavoured to suppress her emotion—or at least to conceal it—but she could do neither: and bursting into tears, she threw herself at Margaret's feet, sobbing bitterly.

"Marion—dear Marion," said the Queen, who was now herself much affected, "what means this violent outburst of grief?"

"Oh, gracious lady!" cried the damsel, "I fear that you yourself are unhappy! I tremble lest some evil intelligence may have reached your Grace's ears! And Oh! to see you afflicted, beloved Queen, were to feel that my own heart is breaking!—because to you do my mother and myself owe everything! It is your Majesty who has given us the bread which we eat—the roof which shelters us—the garments which we wear—"

"And you in return, Marion," said the Queen, in a kind caressing tone, "give me the love of a faithful and affectionate heart; and thus the obligation is mutual."

"You are graciously pleased to say so, revered Queen," rejoined Marion: "but for my part I feel that immense is the debt of gratitude which I owe towards your Highness! Would to heaven that there were some means by which I could display my devotion!—some mode whereby I could demonstrate my love and affection for your Majesty!"

"Ah!" was the ejaculation that came from the Queen's lips as a thought struck her: then, compelling Marion Galbraith to rise from the kneeling posture which she had assumed, she said, "You possess a good and grateful heart: and perhaps the time may come—who can tell?—when I may be glad to unbosom all my anxious feelings—"

"Ah, gracious Queen!" exclaimed Marion; "is it indeed possible that you foresee a period of unhappiness? May all good angels avert it! But if it should come"—and here the damsel gazed with tender earnestness upon Margaret's countenance,— "if it *should* come, your Highness may rely upon me as a sincere and faithful friend, although a humble one! Yes, beloved Queen!—you may look upon me as one who will lay down her life in your service—comparatively valueless though that life may be!"

Margaret threw her arms about Marion's neck, and embraced her tenderly, tears trickling from the eyes of both.

"Thank you, dearest Marion—thank you," said Margaret, "for all the kind words you have just spoken. I believe you—Oh, yes! I believe you!—and as a proof of it, I am about to solicit a favour at your hands."

"A favour, your Highness?" ejaculated Marion. "No, no!—it is not a favour which a Queen can ask: it is a mandate which she issues—and that command is obeyed! Tell me therefore, what can I do to testify my devotion to your grace?"

"Circumstances have occurred," proceeded Mar-

garet, "which render it absolutely necessary that I should see the Earl of Bassentyne. Ah! you start, Marion?"

"No, gracious lady," said the damsel, instantaneously recovering herself—though perhaps her cheeks remained somewhat paler than they usually were.

"Yes—but I saw that you *did* start!" rejoined the Queen. "And no wonder! You are surprised at the wish which I have intimated? You may deem it strange—you may deem it indiscreet—"

"It is not for me," replied Marion, more distantly respectful and less fervid in her manner than she ere now had been,— "it is not for me to judge the actions of my Sovereign."

"And yet it is natural, I repeat," continued Margaret, "that you should consider it strange on my part to desire an interview with the Earl of Bassentyne. Doubtless you must have heard that previous to my union with the King there was some rumour that the Earl of Bassentyne sought to pay his court to me?—But I see that your manner has suddenly changed, Marion," said the Queen, thus interrupting herself, and at once assuming a cold tone and dignified look. "It was wrong to take you at your word!—wrong to think that the language which flowed from your lips embodied the sentiments that were sincerely felt in your heart. Let whatsoever has now passed between us be forgotten, and be regarded by both as if it had never taken place at all."

Marion burst into tears; and throwing herself a second time at the Queen's feet, she cried in accents of passionate grief, "Oh, your words kill me! I beseech and implore, gracious lady, that you will not judge me thus harshly! I meant nothing!—I call all the saints to witness my declaration that my lips have spoken with sincerity the sentiments of my heart, and that I am ready to go through fire and water to serve your Highness!"

"Rise, my dear friend—for such indeed you are!" said Margaret: "rise, Marion!"—and again the Queen pressed the damsel to her bosom.

"You said I could serve you, beloved lady," cried Marion. "Tell me, I entreat—tell me how."

"Yes—you can serve me," interjected the Queen: "but it must be under circumstances of the utmost secrecy and precaution—"

"If it be necessary to keep the secret from even my own mother," rejoined Marion impressively, "it shall be kept! Your Highness desires an interview with the Earl of Bassentyne—"

"Yes—circumstances require it," responded Margaret. "But, Oh! do not misjudge me!—do not think, my dear friend, that I am capable of harbouring an idea detrimental to my own hitherto stainless repute or to the honour of my royal husband! You shall be present at the interview."

An exclamation full of fervour burst from the lips of Marion Galbraith. It might have been an exclamation expressive of extreme thankfulness for the amount of confidence thus reposed in her; or it might have been an exclamation of joy to find that any momentary misgiving which she had entertained in reference to the Queen's sentiments, was so completely unfounded:—but which it precisely was, we cannot now tell.

"Oh, never for an instant mistrust me!" ejaculated Margaret. "I am incapable of forgetting that I am a wife and a queen! But now, dear Marion—how," she asked, "can an intimation be conveyed to the Earl of Bassentyne that his presence is required here? It is for you to help me in this strait. This is the service which I implore of you. Think what can be done! You know the Earl of Bassentyne; and it was on account of his

escape from the Bass Rock Castle that your poor father lost his life!"

A low moan came from the lips of Marion; her bosom heaved and fell with the paroxysm that inwardly convulsed her; for though her conscience acquitted her of all wrong in having aided Roland of Bassentyne's escape, yet a pang smote her with all the power of a remorse as she remembered that the consequence of that escape had been her sire's death.

"Ah!" said Margaret, "it is a painful subject, dearest Marion, on which I have touched!"—yet was the Queen very far from suspecting that the damsel herself was the authoress of the incident which had caused Sir John Galbraith's death. "Forgive me for alluding to the theme: but it is necessary—it is unavoidable in the discussion of our plans. Tell me therefore, Marion—are there any means by which my object can be accomplished? Think you that the Earl of Bassentyne would be chivalrous enough to obey a summons from yourself if you sent it?"

"The Earl of Bassentyne, gracious lady," answered Marion, in a low but firm voice, "would obey a summons of that description. Will your Majesty leave it to me? Not another word is necessary—unless indeed your Highness has any further instructions to give?"

"I have none," rejoined Margaret. "But tell me, dear Marion—whom do you purpose to employ as your messenger in this most delicate proceeding?"

"There is one beneath this roof," returned Marion, "who is ever ready and willing to render a service—whose delight it appears to be to diffuse happiness around him,—one who watches as it were to catch the whisper of the slightest wish that is breathed from the lips—"

"Ah!" ejaculated the Queen; "you allude to the dwarf Mompesson? In good sooth, I do not think you could make a better choice! I have heard that he is as discreet and as trustworthy as he is good-hearted and generous-souled."

"And I verily believe," rejoined Marion, "that such is his true character. It will need no billet nor written note with such a messenger as this:—a verbal summons, earnestly yet graciously couched, will suffice."

"Go, dearest Marion," said the Queen; "and arrange the proceeding according to your own good judgment and discretion. But remember! not a syllable to a single soul!—no, not even to your own mother!"

"Your Grace," replied the damsel, "has already received my solemn assurance to that effect."

Marion thereupon quitted the Queen's apartment; and in less than half-an-hour afterwards Mompesson rode forth from Urquhart Castle. He was mounted on his own magnificent steed; for we should observe that shortly after he had taken up his abode at Urquhart Castle, he had fetched thither that steed from the ravine, pretending that he had bought it of a dealer at a neighbouring town. Away, therefore, sped the dwarf on the back of his fast-going animal:—away he sped, exulting in the business which had been entrusted to him. The distance from Glen Urquhart to Dalkeith was about a hundred and twenty miles; but this was accomplished in less than a couple of days, inasmuch as on the present occasion there was nothing to prevent the dwarf from hiring fresh steeds as often as was alike suitable and convenient. It was therefore between ten and eleven o'clock in the evening of the day following that of his departure from Glen Urquhart, that Mompesson arrived at Dalkeith Castle.

The Countess of Morton had just retired to her

private apartment, and was about to submit herself to the ministrations of her handmaidens for the night-toilet, when Mompesson's arrival was announced. Without suffering her countenance to display any degree of excitement, she mentally ejaculated, "This must be something of importance!"—and she proceeded to the apartment where the dwarf awaited her presence.

This was the first time the Countess of Morton and Mompesson had met since the latter had set off, about two months and a half back, to carry out the views and instructions of his unprincipled mistress. What was it which had occurred in the interval to make the Countess cast a peculiar look upon the dwarf?—a look of shuddering significance, so to speak, as if there were the knowledge of some dark sinister secrets between them. And what was it that made Mompesson bend upon the Countess a glance of similar meaning, though perhaps more sinister in one sense and more deeply fraught with the hardihood of crime in another sense? Yes—there was evidently a dark ominous understanding between those two!—the sinister intelligence which guilt establishes between two depraved minds—the horrible intimacy which breaks down the barriers of social ranks and degrees when turpitude hath consolidated an identity of interests! Yet upon that subject only a few words passed; and these were hastily exchanged, for the Countess was evidently anxious to escape as soon as possible from a colloquial contact with that topic.

"And now what brings you hither my worthy friend?" she demanded. "Is success already attending the projects which you have so admirably ramified?"

"Success!" echoed the dwarf, grinning hideously and chuckling horribly; "success the most signal!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the Countess of Morton, with the anxiety of a feverish joy.

"Yes!" and again Mompesson grinned and chuckled, while he rubbed his hands with delight, and his head seemed to be actually rolling about on his shoulders as if it were merely balanced there without being connected to the body by anything in the shape of a neck. "Success the most signal!" cried the imp.

"Tell me, my good friend—tell me, I beseech you, what have you done? what is taking place?"—and the Countess adopted the most caressing tone and manner towards Mompesson.

"What would your ladyship think," added the dwarf, "if the Queen had sent for the Earl of Bassentyne?"

"No!—is this possible?" ejaculated the Countess, scarcely able to believe her own ears.

"It is possible!" cried Mompesson: "it is true! I tarry here but a few minutes to give your ladyship the information: for within the hour that is passing will the summons be delivered to Roland of Bassentyne to repair to Castle Urquhart!"

"My dear Mompesson," cried the Countess, in a tone of exultation, "I could almost embrace you! But this summons—is it a written one?"

"No, no! they are too cautious!" answered the dwarf.

"They?" echoed Louisa. "To whom do you allude?"

"I mean Mistress Marion Galbraith—handsome Marion—beautiful, interesting Marion—the Queen's confidential damsel!" exclaimed Mompesson.

"Ah! then the summons is a verbal one?" cried the Countess.

"Yes, a verbal one," rejoined Mompesson; "and it is ostensibly on Mistress Marion Galbraith's behalf—though as a matter of course—"

"Yes, yes! 'tis all the same!" ejaculated Louisa: "the message comes from the Queen! it is the Queen whom the Earl is to visit—and he will understand that it is so!"

"He cannot well do otherwise," the dwarf hastened to observe; "for even if he do not by any accident suspect it at the outset, he will know in the moment we set foot within the precincts of Urquhart Castle, on account of the precautions that are to be taken."

"Ah! precautions?" echoed Louisa. "Better and better! The more studied the precautions, the more deliberate and unpardonable the guilt of the faithless wife who is receiving a paramour in the absence of her husband! But these precautions—of what nature are they?"

"When we arrive at Urquhart Castle," responded the dwarf,—"which arrival we are to time so that it shall be in the evening after dusk,—I am to introduce the Earl stealthily to my own apartment: then I am to notify promptly and secretly to Marion Galbraith that he is come."

"And then?" asked the Countess, eagerly.

"Ah! *then*," added Mompesson, with a significant grin, "we must conjecture what will follow. Perhaps Mistress Marion will dismiss me from the apartment, in order that I may be impressed with the idea that it was really for herself only that the summons was sent to the Earl. But I shall be upon the watch."

"Yes, yes—you must be upon the watch, Mompesson!" said the Countess; "and you must avail yourself of every circumstance to implicate the Queen!"

"Trust to me, noble lady," rejoined the dwarf, "to make you Queen of Scotland!"

With these words he abruptly quitted the apartment; and in the course of a few minutes he was again in the saddle, rapidly shaping his course towards Bassentyne Castle, which was at no great distance from Dalkeith.

CHAPTER LXXVIII

THE INTERVIEW.

It was between nine and ten o'clock, on the second evening after Mompesson's appearance at Dalkeith Castle, that it was notified to Queen Margaret that the Earl of Bassentyne had arrived. Her Majesty had calculated—from what Mompesson had told Marion ere setting off—that this would be the particular evening on which the interview would take place, supposing that the summons was obeyed by Roland. She had habited herself in queenly apparel, so that at the very first glance the Earl might comprehend it was as a queen that she received him, and not as a weak yielding woman in whose bosom the spark of former affection was rekindling.

It was in her own private sitting-room that Margaret received the intimation from Marion Galbraith, as above stated.

"And what said the dwarf?" inquired the Queen. "Does the Earl appear to suspect—?"

"Mompesson simply informed me that his lordship had arrived," answered Marion. "Yes—I forgot! He told me likewise that he had succeeded in introducing the Earl, without observation, to his own apartment: for a muffling cloak concealed his lordship's countenance. That is all I have to state, gracious lady."

Margaret's heart palpitated as she murmured to herself, "What will he think? what idea will he form? what can his sentiments now be towards me?"

Are they hostile? or are they friendly?" Then recovering her self-possession, she turned towards Marion, saying, "Go, now, my dear young friend—and speak in the sense which has already been agreed upon between us."

Marion quitted the apartment; and gliding along two or three passages, she reached a landing that communicated with Mompesson's room. But on reaching the door she did not immediately knock: stopped short—she placed her hand upon her heart, as if to still its strong pulsations; the colour went and came rapidly upon her countenance, though no one beheld her;—and she ejaculated with the secret voice of her inward soul, "I am about to see him again! Oh, wherefore have I thus constantly cherished his image for upwards of three long years? Perhaps he still loves the Queen?—and at all events what can Marion Galbraith be to the rich and powerful Earl of Bassentyne!"

There was an instant when the young lady's emotions were so strong as to be well-nigh overpowering, and she tottered against the wall for support. But at that moment it struck her that she heard a footfall in one of the adjacent passages; and regaining her presence of mind—composing her looks likewise with all the modest dignity of a maiden who was enabled to exercise a becoming control over her feelings—she opened the door and entered the room.

The Earl of Bassentyne—who had thrown off the muffling cloak and who now appeared in a handsome travelling-suit—hastened forward on beholding the young lady; and taking her hand, he said with a significant look, "You see that your summons was immediately sufficient to bring me hither. It had all the force of a paramount mandate!"

Marion made a sign for the dwarf to withdraw; and as he was about to cross the threshold, she hastily whispered to him, "Retire, worthy Mompesson, for one hour: and at the expiration of that period you can return."

Mompesson disappeared, closing the door behind him. Marion and the Earl were alone together.

"Three years and some months have elapsed," said Roland, in an impressive tone, "since you rendered me, fair maiden, one of the greatest services which one human being could bestow upon another, short of the salvation of a life! You gave me my liberty. Accept again and again the assurance of my most fervid gratitude. Need I say that never have I forgotten the noble action which on that occasion you performed! And, Oh!" he continued, solemnly now mingling with the impressiveness of his speech, "believe me that I have deeply felt the death of your sire; for although neither you nor I need actually reproach ourselves, yet have I felt for you—yes, I have felt for you, as"—he paused for a moment, as if hesitating how to convey the full meaning of his sentiments, and then he added—"as a brother might feel for a very dear sister!"

The tears had risen into Marion's eyes: she wiped them away; but it was nevertheless in a tremulous voice that she said, "My lord, I felt that I was performing a duty at the time,—a duty towards a fellow-creature; and therefore I cannot regret what I did—no, not even when I think of what it subsequently cost me! But you have obeyed my summons; and now tell me frankly—yes, *frankly* I repeat—have you really supposed that it was on my own account I took the liberty of sending for you?"

"Frankly, then," replied the Earl of Bassentyne, "I had my doubts upon the subject. On the one hand I thought to myself that if you, fair maiden, had a service to demand of any living man, you would address yourself to one on whom you had a

claim, which a sister might assert upon a brother: and yet on the other hand I thought that considering many past circumstances, it was just possible there might be *another* who had some mandate to issue—some instruction to give, or something to enjoin!”

“And it is so,” answered Marion. “Without another syllable of preface, let me inform your lordship that her Majesty the Queen requires your presence.”

“I obey,” rejoined the Earl. “I go whither you lead, fair lady. But in the interview that is to take place, suffer me to stipulate—”

“Enough, my lord!” interrupted Marion: “I understand you. I shall be present. It is so arranged by her Grace’s own special command.”

“Lead on: I follow,” said the Earl.

“Ah! one word more, my lord!” interjected Marion: then fixing her eyes for a moment upon the Earl, but modestly bending down her regards the next instant, while a flush mantled on her cheeks, she went on to say, “My lord, I trust that whatever topic may arise between yourself and her Majesty—whatever subject may be mooted—for I myself am ignorant—But to be brief, my lord, I hope that there is one circumstance which will never go forth from your lips—”

“Never!” ejaculated the Earl vehemently. “The succour you rendered me in the hour of my need, is a secret as solemn as if it were a revelation made from the dead! And now lead on, fair lady.”

Marion gently and cautiously opened the door and peeped forth into the passage. It struck her for a moment that she caught a sound of a footstep in one of the diverging corridors, where the individual (if any one really were there) would be hidden from her view: but as all was immediately still again, she concluded that it was merely imagination on her part, or else the echo of the door opening. She passed along the passages, followed by the Earl of Bassentyne. They reached the ante-room leading to the Queen’s private apartment: Marion knocked at the inner door—the voice of Margaret was heard in a firm tone bidding her enter—and they crossed the threshold accordingly, Marion holding back the velvet curtain which covered the entrance.

The Queen came forward to receive the Earl, while Marion Galbraith retreated to the farther extremity of the room. Margaret’s face was pale; but she was completely self-possessed, and her demeanour was alike friendly and dignified. Roland made a courtly obeisance: the Queen advanced another pace or two—and at once judging from his look that there was nothing hostile in his soul towards her, she extended her hand, saying, “Do we meet as friends, my lord?”

The Earl of Bassentyne took that hand; and for a moment touching it with his lips—but lightly as the wing of a bird might come in contact with the leaf of a tree in its flight—he said, “Never have I harboured any other than a sentiment of the most respectful friendship towards your Majesty.”

A gleam of joy shot across Margaret’s countenance; for she instantaneously comprehended that Stephen Cochrane had been guilty of gross deception when representing that the Earl was unfriendly inclined towards her. She knew that Roland was too frank, honourable, and high-minded to profess that which was untrue; she knew likewise that his disposition was of too sterling a nature to permit him to act capriciously by thinking vindictively of her at one time and entertaining amicable sentiments at another.

“A thousand thanks, my lord,” said Margaret, “for the assurance which you have just given me.

I cannot for a moment persuade myself that I have deserved it. I know,” she continued, in a lower tone, so that Marion could not now hear what she was saying, “I know that my conduct must have seemed most unworthy of a lady towards you—perhaps even stronger terms might be used—”

“Do not reproach yourself,” responded the Earl, whose countenance expressed a manly firmness blended with the most noble and chivalrous courtesy. “In a few words everything may be summed up. A crown was laid at your feet: it was incomparably beyond the value of the coronet of a countess—and you accepted it! It was natural enough.”

“How generous on your part! how forgiving!” murmured Margaret, with much emotion. “But you have yet to learn wherefore I sent for you hither. On a certain day—at Roslin Castle,” she hesitatingly continued—and now the colour went and came rapidly upon her cheeks—“we changed rings—you remember—”

“Yes—and the one which I received from you,” interjected Roland, “was stolen from me—yes, vilely plundered, at the time that I was consigned to the Castle of the Bass Rock.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Margaret, a light flashing in unto her brain: “then it was *thus* that the ring was recovered by that villain Cochrane and subsequently restored to me!”

“Yes—it was *thus*,” said the Earl. “But Ah, gracious lady! that *other* ring—the ring which you received from me—”

“That ring,” interrupted Margaret, “I call all the saints to witness that I took the proper measure to restore it to you! Oh, what must you have thought of me? how must you have interpreted my supposed silence? Yes—I declare to you that I penned a letter—no matter *now* what its contents were—I enclosed the ring therein—and I gave the packet to Cochrane—”

“I never received it,” rejoined the Earl.

“I know it,” said Margaret. “But it was only a few days ago that the fact was made known to me. In short, the villain, Stephen Cochrane, kept the packet with the ulterior view of having me some day completely in his power.”

An ejaculation of anger burst from Roland’s lips; and he placed his hand upon his sword.

“Yes—it is so,” said the Queen; “and he has threatened me! He sought me within these walls—he stipulated for terms which I cannot possibly grant—In short, my lord, his conduct was outrageous! Ah! and he even went so far as to declare that you had suffered him to become acquainted with your sentiments towards me—and that these sentiments were entirely hostile.”

“Tell me where I may encounter this foul deceiver,” said the Earl of Bassentyne, his countenance flushing with anger, “and by St. Andrew of Scotland! he shall be most signally chastised! Doubtless, he still retains the letter and the ring?”

“Yes—to hold them as it were in terror over me,” replied Margaret.

“He shall surrender them,” rejoined the Earl; and then his lips were compressed with the sternness of a fixed resolution. “Where may I meet with him?”

“On the ninth day hence,” replied the Queen, “precisely at the hour of noon—in the midst of a grove overhanging Loch Ness. Behold! the moon is bright—you can see the spot from this window.”

Margaret drew aside the curtain, and indicated the grove to the Earl of Bassentyne.

“It is enough,” he said. “I will meet the man

re day and at the hour your
names."

There was now a brief pause, during which there was also a certain degree of embarrassment. The Queen and the Earl looked at each other; and then their glances were immediately withdrawn. He beheld before him that woman of grand and gorgeous beauty whom he had so devotedly loved:—she beheld before her that handsome and polished nobleman, still quite young—for he was only eight-and-twenty—whose wife she might have been, but whom she had so cruelly deceived! She was in all the glory of her majestic loveliness: he was still handsome as ever—but there was a certain settled pensiveness in his looks—the marks of care were even discernible upon his face—he was evidently a man whose heart had writhed continuously and painfully with a secret grief. That he had been abroad for three years, and that since his return to Scotland he had secluded himself in his own castle, Margaret knew: but inasmuch as she suspected the reasons, it was a topic which she dared not touch upon. On the other hand, he longed to express a hope that she was happy; but he dared not!—he even dreaded that the response, if truly given, might not be in the affirmative.

The pause became fraught with awkwardness and embarrassment for both; and the Queen, suddenly recovering her self-possession, said, "My lord, you now understand the motives which induced me to crave this interview. Your conduct has ever been magnanimous and noble towards me:—accept, I beseech, the renewed assurances of all my gratitude, not merely for the past, but likewise for the present, and for that which you promise to accomplish for me in reference to the unprincipled man Stephen Cochrane."

She proffered her hand; and the Earl of Bassentyne, sinking upon one knee, again touched it with his lips. The whole tenour of his conduct was delicately courteous as well as respectful: it was the magnanimous demeanour of a true knight towards one of whom he dared now think only as a queen and as the wife of another. Margaret turned away somewhat abruptly, for her heart was full of emotion; and she beckoned Marion to conduct the Earl from the apartment.

The damsel and the Earl went forth together; and in the ante room adjoining Marion stopped, saying, "I must here bid you farewell, my lord; for you can find your own way back to the dwarf's chamber."

"Farewell," answered the Earl. "We shall soon meet again; for in ten days I may have something of importance to communicate to her Majesty; and perhaps you, fair lady, will become the medium of such communication."

He pressed her hand:—Marion peeped out into the passage; and observing no one, and hearing no sound of footsteps or of voices, she made a sign for the Earl to hasten forth. He crossed the threshold, and the door was closed behind him. There was a lamp suspended in the passage which he was now threading; but the one into which he next turned was involved in obscurity.

He was gliding along, when suddenly he heard a door open—a curtain was drawn back—a light flashed upon his countenance and a lady made her appearance, carrying a lamp in her hand. In that woman, who possessed all the remains of a once magnificent beauty, and who was superbly apparelled, in that woman whose eyes were at once riveted with a peculiar expression upon him—he recognised her whose illicit love he had so virtuously rejected:—for it was Lady Galbraith who now stood before the Earl of Bassentyne!

CHAPTER LXXIX.

MAUDE.—THE LETTER AND THE RING.

THE Earl of Bassentyne was for a moment seized with confusion: but he quickly recovered his presence of mind; and bowing with suitable courtesy, he was about to pass on, as if he felt he had a perfect right to be there and could not be called upon to give any explanations. But Lady Galbraith exclaimed, with a seeming air of astonishment, "What! is it indeed my Lord of Bassentyne that I thus encounter?"

"At your ladyship's service," replied the nobleman, who was now compelled to stop: but there was a certain degree of coldness mingling with the courtesy of his demeanour towards Lady Galbraith, for he could not possibly forget the overtures she had made to him in the Castle of the Bass Rock.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," she continued; and so peculiar was the look which she again bent upon Roland, that he knew not whether it expressed irony and hatred, or whether it was meant to deprecate any feelings of aversion, contempt, or disgust which he himself might experience towards her. "I was not aware" of your lordship's presence within the walls of Urquhart Castle," she continued. "But how is it that your lordship is wandering alone in the obscurity of these passages? Who could have been uncourteous enough to leave you thus unattended? Perhaps you will permit me to repair that want of politeness, from whatever quarter it may have emanated?—and if your lordship will only name the person whom you seek, I will endeavour to instruct you how to find the individual's apartment."

"I thank your ladyship for this courtesy," replied Roland, more and more bewildered what to think of her tone and manner towards him; "but I am at no loss to find my way——"

"At all events a personage of your rank," interrupted Lady Galbraith, now smiling with a most gracious air, "must be suitably attended. What ho! Quincey! Come hither!"

As she thus spoke, Lady Galbraith opened the door behind the curtain against which she was standing; and a middle-aged, sedate-looking serving-man made his appearance in answer to her summons.

"Here, Quincey," continued Lady Galbraith; "take a taper or a lamp, and light the Earl of Bassentyne on his way through these passages. My lord, I bid you good evening."

Lady Galbraith bowed with an air of the most affable courtesy; and Roland, relaxing from the coldness of his own demeanour towards her, returned the salutation with a friendly politeness; for he now felt inclined to put the best interpretation on Lady Galbraith's conduct—he thought that she wished to draw a veil over the past, and that she had therefore studied to treat him with the most lady-like courtesy.

The servitor Quincey was now standing in readiness to lead the way whithersoever Roland might direct; and he carried a light in his hand. The Earl was bewildered how to act. His presence in the castle was now known to those who would be certain to speak of it; and all the precautions which had been taken to ensure his stealthy entrance within those walls were suddenly neutralized. He had not dared make with Lady Galbraith a mystery of his presence in the castle: he had not ventured to entertain that it might be regarded with secrecy. It was therefore useless now to deliver any such injunction to Quincey. But it was absolutely necessary that he should seem to have some specific purpose for his



visit to Urquhart Castle,—some object which might prevent suspicion from approaching the actual truth. He must inquire for some person! Why not ask therefore for the dwarf as well as for any one else?

"Whither shall I lead, my lord?" asked Quincey, with a stiff sedate bow.

"To the apartment of worthy Master Mompesson," responded the Earl.

Again the servitor bowed: he then led the way along the passages; and in a few minutes the door of Mompesson's room was reached.

"Thanks for your civility," said the Earl, as he dropped a coin into Quincey's hand.

The man bowed and withdrew,—while Roland passed into Mompesson's quarters. The dwarf was not there; for the hour during which Marion had enjoined him to be absent, was not yet passed. The Earl of Bassentyne therefore waited about twenty minutes, ~~waiting~~ on all that had taken place with Margaret and with Lady Galbraith;—and at the expiration of that time the dwarf made his appearance.

"I am afraid," said Roland, "that after all my visit here will be talked about."

"Indeed, my lord?" ejaculated Mompesson, with an assumed air of surprise and vexation. "How so?"

"Because Lady Galbraith has become aware of my presence—her lacquy also—"

"Indeed, my lord!" again cried the dwarf. "Do you mean that they have been here—to my room?"

"Not exactly," rejoined the Earl, with some little degree of confusion. "The truth is, I walked in the adjacent passages with Mistress Marion Galbraith—"

"Ah, well, my lord," said Mompesson, "if you choose to be thus indiscreet—"

"True, my worthy little friend!" interjected Roland; "it is not your fault. But look you! If you hear aught said upon the subject, it will be better for you to make it appear that I came of my own accord to see you. Say that we are old friends, if you will—devise any excuse you may think fit—"

"Trust to me, my lord," interrupted Mompesson. "I will watch the progress of matters and act with the discretion that may be governed by circumstances."

"And now," said the Earl, "it were well that I should take my departure. Shall it be with secrecy and stealthiness, as before?—or shall I now go forth openly?"

"No, no, my lord!" ejaculated Mompesson. "Secretly and stealthily, if you please. The fewer that know of your visit here, the better! Perhaps Mistress Marion will be enabled to pacify her mother, and to place the seal of silence upon the lips of Quincey."

"Ah! now I bethink me," exclaimed the Earl, "it will be necessary that you should lose no time in informing Mistress Marion Galbraith of the misadventure."

"Ah, then, Miss Marion was not with your lordship at the time?" said the dwarf, affecting an air of the utmost innocence and ingenuousness, as if he did really and truly believe that it was wholly and solely on Marion's account the Earl had been secretly summoned to the castle.

"Will you undertake that task for me?" inquired Roland: "will you seek an interview with Mistress Marion Galbraith with the least possible delay?"

"Trust to me, my lord, I again say," interrupted the dwarf; "and everything shall be done for the best."

The Earl now muffled himself once more in his cloak; and Mompesson, having peeped forth into the passage to assure himself that the coast was clear, signified his readiness to escort the nobleman. A private staircase in the immediate neighbourhood of Mompesson's apartment, enabled them to reach the court-yard without being observed or attracting any notice; and then they passed through the gates together, the dwarf giving the password. The Earl's steed was concealed amongst some trees at a little distance; and ere he mounted into the saddle, he bestowed a liberal gift upon Mompesson.

Away sped Roland of Bassentyne;—and Mompesson rapidly retraced his steps into the castle. He traversed the court-yard—he ascended the private staircase—and he was about to enter his apartment, when a female figure glided towards him, along one of the adjacent passages.

"Ah, Mistress Maude!" he ejaculated. "Bear you any message for me?"

"No, Mompesson," she replied: "but I wish to speak to you on my own account."

"Walk in," said the dwarf, throwing open the door of his room.

Maude followed him. This young woman was now about twenty-one years of age; and, as we have already said, she was high alike in the favour and the service of Queen Margaret. Exceedingly beautiful was she; but for some little time past her looks had been pensive and her mind seemed to be oppressed with a secret grief.

"And now, pretty Mistress Maude," asked the dwarf, when the door was closed and they were alone together in that apartment, "what have you to say unto me?"

"Mompesson," replied the young woman, suddenly bursting into tears, "I can endure this mode of life no longer!"

"I am very sorry for it, my dear," replied the dwarf coolly; "for it seems to me that your's is a very happy kind of life. You are principal tire-woman to her Majesty—you are caressed and petted—you receive a handsome pecuniary remuneration—and I dare swear it is your own fault if you have not already accompanied your lover Arthur Curtoys to the altar."

"Do not talk to me of happiness," ejaculated Maude petulantly, as she dashed away the tears from her eyes, "when you must know that my mind has been harassed with misgivings ever since you took up your residence within these walls! I feel as if I were a guilty thing!—as if I were conniving at some treachery towards a beloved mistress!"

"I cannot help what your feelings are," rejoined Mompesson, with the cold heartlessness which was naturally his character; "but I can tell you that it is very foolish for you to give way to these silly apprehensions; and I must remind you of the penalties you will incur by whispering the slightest syllable that shall be detrimental to me or my interests."

"But tell me, Mompesson," exclaimed Maude, "what is your object in dwelling beneath this roof? Why did you throw yourself in the Queen's way?—why adopt that strange stratagem at the cave in order to commend yourself to the Royal favour?"

"Does not every one like to live under the sunshine of such protection?" demanded the dwarf. "Did not you quit the service of the Countess of Morton to enter into that of Margaret? Why, then, should not I adopt a similar course?"

"Oh, the circumstances are so different!" exclaimed Maude vehemently. "The Queen knew that I was in the service of the Countess of Morton at the time; but she does not know that you were in that service! And then too, I gave her Majesty proofs of my fidelity and devotion; but you, Mom-

possession—Oh, I am convinced that you are playing some sinister game!”

“Peace, foolish girl!” ejaculated the dwarf angrily. “But perhaps it were as well if I were to recapitulate a few little facts, to which I desire your most patient attention. Did you not in the first instance receive a billet from me, preparing you to meet me, in some capacity or another, in the neighbourhood of Castle Urquhart—warning you not to give way to any sudden surprise—?”

“Yes, yes—I received that billet,” interrupted Maude; “and my heart sank within me. Then the very next day, when I accompanied the Royal retinue, I beheld you at the mouth of the cave!”

“Yes—and you were a good girl, Maude,” exclaimed Mompesson, “inasmuch as neither by word nor look did you betray the fact that I was no stranger to you. And did I not play my part admirably?” demanded Mompesson, chuckling with delight and rubbing his hands gleefully together.

“Oh, I felt,” cried Maude, “as if I had suddenly become the most wicked of sinners! the accomplice of your knaveries and trickeries!”

“Come, come, my pretty girl,” interrupted Mompesson, “no harsh language, if you please! It suited me to work myself into the favour of Royalty; and inasmuch as circumstances were required to accomplish that end, I created those circumstances for myself. When you wished to transfer your services from the Countess’s household to the Queen’s, you found the circumstances ready prepared for you—”

“Oh, spare all this verbiage!” cried Maude impatiently; “for it seems to me as if it were replete with a sophistry which you are calling into requisition in order to conceal evil aims and objects—or else to divert my attention from the main point. Tell me therefore, Mompesson,—tell me at once!—what are you doing in Castle Urquhart?”

“Living happily and comfortably, as you perceive, my dear girl,” responded the dwarf.

“Evasion!” ejaculated Maude. “You must have an object—I am convinced of it! Why that journey from which you have just returned? Why that absence of four days?”

“I thought that every soul in the castle knew that I merely went on a little pleasure-trip to Aberdeen,” said Mompesson, with that same air of innocence and ingenuousness which he had ere now assumed when in discourse with the Earl of Bassentyne. “Really, Maude, you are very suspicious!”

“For upwards of two long months,” exclaimed the young woman, “have I been full of suspicion!—for upwards of two long months have I felt as if I had become the wilful accomplice in some crime that is being perpetrated! The Queen asks me why I am pensive—Mistress Marion Galbraith asks me—Arthur Curtoys questions me in a similar strain; and what reply can I give? I speak evasively; and thus, by my very tone and manner the suspicion is strengthened that there is some secret care gnawing at my heart: I will endure it no longer, Mompesson!”

“Put an end to it then,” said the dwarf, coolly; “and you know the consequences. If you ruin me, I will ruin you. I told you so plainly enough in the billet which I secretly forwarded to you three months ago: I have repeated the warning half-a-dozen times since I have been an inmate of the castle—”

“Oh, yes!” interjected Maude bitterly, “I have not forgotten your hideous threats!”

“I am glad to hear that you are mindful of them,” said the dwarf, with the most provoking calmness. “Go and proclaim, if you will, that Mompesson is

a cheat and an impostor in respect to the art of divination!—go and say what you will of me! But on the other hand, rest assured that in retaliation I shall not fail to warn Arthur Curtoys—”

“Enough! enough!” murmured Maude, her whole countenance expressive of anguish and affliction. “The very walls have ears!”

“Then do not provoke me to speak words which you would wish, unsaid:—and the dwarf fixed his eyes significantly upon the distressed young woman.

“Mompesson,” she said, in a low, deep tone, “you have me in your power: I know it—and you make me feel it! But, Oh! pray prove to me by some means or another that you have no sinister intent with regard to my beloved mistress! Show me that you are not here as a secret agent for the Countess of Morton,—plotting and planning—”

“What on earth can the Countess have to plot and plan against the Queen?” demanded the dwarf, gruffly.

“Perhaps that is a secret which you might reveal if you thought fit. But how can I help being suspicious when I call to mind all the antecedents of the Countess of Morton:—how she was the King’s mistress at one time, and how at another she was succouring him to persecute the wife whom he had secretly married—”

“Enough of all this!” exclaimed Mompesson savagely. “You are rending my very brain with your complaints, your suspicions, and your recapitulations! A truce to this scene! I tell you that I have got nothing to do with the Countess of Morton—and let that suffice! But if fair words will not establish a proper compact between you and me, I must have recourse to foul. You see, Maude, that you extort threats from my lips. By heaven! you had better be cautious, girl!—for if you force me to reveal what I know of you, farewell to the love of Arthur Curtoys! farewell to the favour of the Queen! farewell everything!”

“Mompesson,” murmured the young woman, “you shall have no need to tell that tale! I will still maintain the seal of silence upon my lips—I will keep the secret concerning you, if you will keep the secret concerning me!”

“That is speaking like a rational creature,” observed the dwarf. “Go now, my good Maude!—cheer up—and let that pretty face of yours be wreathed in smiles as it was wont to seem when you and Minnie were the gayest of all sprightly young fairies at Carlisle.”

A quick flush passed over the young woman’s countenance; and heaving a profound sigh, she issued from the dwarf’s apartment.

That same night a messenger was secretly despatched by Lady Galbraith to Edinburgh, where the King was supposed to be at the time. But he courier learnt, on arriving at the capital, that David had gone to Dalkeith Castle; and he at once followed the King thither. The letter of which he was the bearer was speedily delivered into the Royal hand and greedily scanned by the Royal eyes.

“What tidings?” asked the Countess of Morton, who was with the King when the letter was thus delivered to him.

“Everything progresses as I could wish!” responded the Monarch. “Your dwarf did in no way deceive you! But by heaven! these tidings are indeed important in more senses than one!”

“And the Earl of Bassentyne has been to Urquhart Castle?” inquired Louisa, with feverish haste.

“Yes—secretly and stealthily introduced within those walls,” rejoined the King; “for such are the terms which Lady Galbraith uses in her letter.”

"Lady Galbraith?" ejaculated the Countess. "What! can Mompesson have told her anything? or can the Queen have taken her ladyship into her confidence?"

"Nothing of the kind," interrupted the King. "Ever on the watch—intelligent and lynx-eyed—Lady Galbraith beheld some little circumstances which excited her suspicion: she saw that her daughter Marion was preoccupied and anxious—and she remained on the alert. She beheld the dwarf introduce a cloaked individual to his room; then Marion was fetched; and then the young lady proceeded to conduct the new-comer along the passages to the Queen's apartment. Lady Galbraith recognised that individual—it was the Earl of Bassentyne! She listened at the door of the Queen's apartment—she could not overhear all that was said—but she caught sufficient to furnish useful materials for my purpose—"

"In what respect?" inquired the Countess. "Did the Earl of Bassentyne—"

"Really make love to the Queen?" ejaculated the King. "No! nothing of that sort!—and it appears that Marion was present throughout the interview. But would you believe it?—Stephen Cochrane has been to Urquhart Castle! He has threatened the Queen—it was on account of these menaces that she sent for the Earl of Bassentyne. But here! read Lady Galbraith's letter."

The Countess took the despatch and perused it with the utmost avidity.

"Ah!" she ejaculated: "rings exchanged?"

"Yes—almost at the very time when I was insane enough to become infatuated with Margaret's charms," cried the King. "Oh, the heartless creature! But by St. Andrew! if she were thus perjured and forsworn to Roland of Bassentyne, might she not very readily become faithless and inconstant towards me? In sooth, I have a thousand reasons for getting rid of this woman!"

"No doubt of it, sire," exclaimed the Countess of Morton. "She is a Logie—there is a taint in her very blood! The granddaughter of a traitor never ought to have been—Pardon me, sire, for my boldness—"

"Oh, but you are right, Louisa! you are right!" ejaculated David: "the granddaughter of a traitor never ought to have been raised to the Scottish throne! But thence she shall descend! You perceive by this letter that Lady Galbraith confronted the Earl as he was returning from the Queen's apartment?"

"Yes, sire—so save this despatch," answered the Countess. "Lady Galbraith thought it better she should thus throw herself in his way, so that it might not be possible for the fact of his introduction into Urquhart Castle to be subsequently denied."

"And is there not something about one of her ladyship's servant?" inquired the King. "I read the letter hurriedly—and moreover I was excited—"

"Yes—Lady Galbraith was determined there should be a witness, as it appears by her own statement made to your Majesty. She therefore summoned her principal lacquey—Quincey by name—"

"'Twas well and cleverly done on Lady Galbraith's part!" interjected the King. "Does she not say that she will speak not a syllable to her daughter on the subject, but will leave matters to take their own course until she receives further instructions from me?"

"Yes—her language is to that effect," rejoined the Countess. "But this Stephen Cochrane, sire—"

"His sudden appearance on the scene may prove the very greatest service to us," exclaimed the King; "and thanks to the keenness of Lady Galbraith's ears, when she was listening at the door of the Queen's apartment, we shall know where to find him."

It is unnecessary to follow any further the conversation which took place on this occasion between the King and the Countess of Morton; and we must again redirect the attention of our readers to Glen Urquhart.

Several days elapsed; and now the period allowed by Stephen Cochrane for the Queen to fulfil the conditions which he had prescribed, had reached its term. Accordingly, one forenoon, a traveller dismounted from his steed on the bank of Loch Ness at a distance of about half-a-mile from the castle, and pursued his way on foot towards a grove that crowned an eminence overhanging the water. This person was Stephen Cochrane. He was appalled in pretty nearly the same style as when he had presented himself to the Queen precisely a fortnight back; and his countenance bore the traces of recent debauchery. As he ascended the eminence, he every now and then looked carefully around; but he perceived no one—and he was well satisfied that his movements should be thus unobserved.

"Whom shall I meet in that grove?" he asked himself. "Will the Queen come in person? or will she instruct some one to transact the business on her behalf? Is it possible that she could mean anything treacherous? I do not think it!—and yet who can tell? A posse of armed men might seize upon me—deprive me of the letter and the ring—and then leave me, without recompense or reward, to my own bitter disappointment! Let us see if there be not some way to gain additional advantage on my own side."

Stephen Cochrane threw himself on the ground, as if for the purpose of reposing his limbs, under the shade of a knot of trees which were about half-way up the eminence. By the aid of his dagger he dug up a turf; and in the hole he deposited the letter and the ring. Replacing the turf, he muttered to himself, "Now those objects shall only be surrendered up when the money and securities shall have been placed in my hand!"

Stephen Cochrane rose up from the green sward, and continued to ascend the eminence towards the grove which crowned the summit. But scarcely had he set foot within the maze of verdure, when there was a sudden rustling amongst the trees. He turned to fly—but he was too late: his retreat was cut off—he was a prisoner in the hands of some half-dozen armed men, whom he recognised as being in the King's service. By these persons he was hurried through the grove, which was not more than about half-a-mile in circumference; and when the outskirt on the opposite side was reached—namely, where the brow of the eminence completely overlooked the shining waters of Loch Ness—Cochrane found himself in the presence of the King.

"Pardon me, gracious sire," said the man, at once sinking on his knees before the Monarch,—"pardon me, sire, if for any reason your anger has been excited against me!"

"Search his person!" said the King sternly. "There ought to be about him a letter containing a ring—or perhaps the ring may be separate from the letter, supposing the document to have been opened. But you will see!"

"Ah! ha!" thought Cochrane to himself: "this is the purpose of my arrest! Very good! I may now drive a bargain with the King, instead of beholding the fulfilment of the one I made with the Queen?"—then speaking in an audible tone, he said,

"Search me if you will, my brave men; but it will be useless."

"This falsehood shall not serve your purpose, Master Cochrane!" exclaimed the King sternly. "I know full well what I am doing. You see that you would have done better to remain faithful to my interests after all. But enough! Surrender up the articles I have named—or be searched!"

"And what if they are not forthcoming, sire?" asked Cochrane.

"Then shall you be immediately hanged to one of these trees," answered the King, "as a punishment for the roguish use you made of my royal name in respect to the French noblemen in London."

"Gracious King," said Cochrane, now assuming a very penitent air, "may I not hope for the restoration of your royal favour? Though I have not about my person the objects whereof your Grace has spoken—"

"Search him—and have done with it!" ejaculated the King, in a peremptory tone.

Cochrane's person was searched accordingly: indeed his garments were almost torn off his back; but the letter and the ring were not discovered.

"Tell me, knave!" cried the King, who was almost furious with disappointment—"tell me what you have done with those objects?—and beware how you deceive me!"

"If your gracious Highness," answered Cochrane, "would only condescend to take me once more into your royal favour, I might possibly serve your Majesty's purpose in many things—"

"Ah! you begin to perceive that the tables are turning," exclaimed David; "and you now wish to get back again upon the stronger side! First of all surrender up the letter and the ring! Tell me where you have hidden these objects—and then perhaps we may make terms."

"May I really hope, gracious sire," asked Cochrane, "that your royal favour will be restored unto me if I furnish that preliminary proof of my devotion and fidelity?"

"The proof! the proof at once!" exclaimed the King. "By St. Andrew, the knave is going to bandy more words with me!—Hubert, the cord!"

In a moment a halter was produced, and the noose was slipped over the head of Stephen Cochrane. The man shuddered for an instant, but quickly regaining his confidence and self-possession he said, "Sire, it needs not such coercive measures as these to induce me to afford your Majesty the proof of fidelity which you have demanded. I throw myself on your royal mercy."

"This is your best course," interjected David. "And now, without another syllable of useless parley, the letter and the ring!"

"I have buried them in the earth, under the shade of a little knot of trees on the other side of the hill. Deign to suffer me to lead your Majesty thither."

"Lead on!" said the King; "and keep the halter still about your neck. Beware how you trifle with me!—for I am now in no mood to brook treachery or deceit!"

"Your royal favour or else an ignominious death!" said Stephen Cochrane. "I trust myself to the issue."

With these words, Cochrane began to retrace the pathway through the grove, the royal guards following close at his heels; while the King—who was attended by a couple of pages—brought up the rear. In this manner the grove was threaded—and the descent towards the knot of trees was commenced: In a few minutes those trees were reached; and Cochrane proceeded straight to the spot where he had buried the letter and the ring.

"It is here," he said; and he lifted up the turf which he had cut with his dagger's point.

But what words can describe the terror, the dismay, the consternation—blank and cold—which seized upon the wretched man when he found not the objects of his search! Was it possible? The letter and the ring were gone! And now a wild cry suddenly pealed forth from his lips; and throwing himself upon his knees, he exclaimed, "Mercy, mercy, sire! I swear to your Highness that I buried the articles here!"

The eyes of the entire party swept their glances around; but not a soul besides themselves was to be seen. Who could have taken the letter and the ring?

"By St. Andrew!" David's voice literally thundered forth, "this miserable trickery shall be summarily punished! Hubert, do your duty!"

Another shriek—another, and another, pealed forth from the throat of the miserable Cochrane, blended with the most passionate and piteous entreaties for mercy. But the King was in a mood to show none; and the execution took place. One extremity of the cord was thrown over the bough of a tree; and Cochrane's last yell of anguish was abruptly cut short by the mortal agony of suffocation.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE EARL AND THE DWARF.

THE Earl of Bassentyne had not been unmindful of his promise to Queen Margaret. Clad in a deep disguise, he had repaired to the eminence overhanging Loch Ness, at least an hour before the time at which he expected Stephen Cochrane to make his appearance in that neighbourhood; and the better to escape observation, he concealed himself amidst a clump of trees growing half-way up the ascent. After having waited for some time, Roland perceived a party of horsemen wending their way along the bank of the spacious piece of water; and at first he fancied that Cochrane might have possibly come with an escort. The horsemen entered a thicket which concealed them from Roland's view, but only for the space of a few minutes,—at the expiration of which they reappeared. This time they came on foot, for they had left their steeds in the thicket.

They began to mount the eminence—while Roland, still concealed among the trees, watched their movements. If it were indeed Stephen Cochrane, accompanied by a posse of friends, Roland felt bitterly vexed with himself that he should have come alone thither in the hope of encountering Cochrane also alone, and of overpowering him in fair fight. But scarcely had the Earl expressed this regret within his own breast, when his mind was suddenly startled on recognising King David as one of the members of that party. It was now more than ever expedient that Roland should lie close in his hiding-place, so as to keep a sharp eye upon the progress of events; for the plot seemed to be altogether thickening, and a new turn might be given to the march of incidents by the sudden and unexpected appearance of the King in that neighbourhood.

David and his attendants speedily disappeared again from the view of the Earl of Bassentyne, inasmuch as they were now striking off into a path which led them towards that part of the grove which overlooked the waters of Loch Ness; while the clump of trees where the nobleman lay hidden, was on that part of the hillock which looked towards the Glen. A thousand conflicting ideas passed through

Roland's mind. Was Stephen Cochrane acting a traitorous part towards the Queen and preparing to consummate some nefarious bargain with the King?—or, on the other hand, had David by some means learnt that Cochrane was to be there at that hour for a special purpose? and was his Majesty lying in wait to intercept the expected individual and rifle his person of articles that might be made to tell disparagingly against Margaret? Was there a traitor within the walls of Urquhart Castle?—and if so, who could it be? Not Mompesson surely!—not Marion Galbraith! No, no! it were impossible (thought the Earl of Bassentyne) that either of these could have said aught to betray the Queen! Besides, how could Mompesson know anything about Roland's interview with the Queen—or the expected meeting with Stephen Cochrane in the grove—or the object of such meeting? No!—only one person could possibly have betrayed Margaret, besides Stephen Cochrane himself: and that must be Marion Galbraith. But sooner than believe such an atrocity, Roland would have put faith in anything else that was monstrously preposterous or incredible.

All his ideas therefore were again settling themselves upon the probable treachery of Stephen Cochrane and a supposed collusion with the King, when the sounds of footsteps reached the nobleman's ear. He peeped from his hiding-place, and beheld the object of his thoughts advancing towards that very knot of trees. Yes—Stephen Cochrane himself! Roland remained quiet,—mentally ejaculating, "I will spring upon him when he comes near enough! I will take him unawares! I must at the first moment prevent his throat from giving utterance to any cry of alarm which may bring the King's party to his assistance. Everything is fair when dealing with perfidious wretches of this description!"

Cochrane advanced, as we have already seen, into the shade thrown by the knot of trees; and he flung himself upon the greensward, muttering at the moment loud enough to be overheard by Roland, "Let us see if there be not some way to gain additional advantage on my own side!"

The Earl of Bassentyne was on the very point of springing forth from his lair when these strange words struck his ears: he accordingly checked himself—he remained perfectly motionless, to fathom, if possible, Cochrane's meaning. Nor was he kept long in suspense; for the man drew his dagger from its sheath, raised a turf, and beneath it concealed a small package. This being done, and the turf being replaced, Cochrane rose from the grass beneath the shade of the trees, and continued his way towards the grove on the summit of the hillock. Then forth from his hiding-place stole the Earl of Bassentyne: he raised the turf—he opened the packet:—it contained the letter and the ring!

Mechanically did the Earl replace the turf, without having any particular motive for so doing; and he then darted away with his prize. Down the descent he sped; and he had a full opportunity thus to escape observation, because it was at the very time when Stephen Cochrane was being hurried through the grove into the presence of King David.

In a very few minutes the Earl of Bassentyne reached another little clump of trees, in the midst of which he might securely hide himself while he deliberated on the course which he had next to pursue. The letter contained in the packet was unsealed; or rather we should say that the seal had been broken; and it was addressed to himself. Three years and some months had elapsed since it was written; and thus the chivalrous disposition of Roland suggested for a moment a doubt whether he had any right to penetrate into its contents at

that remote date. But a second thought convinced him that a letter once addressed to himself, was always his own, so to speak, and might at any instant be read by him whenever it should come to hand. Besides, he naturally experienced a deep curiosity to ascertain in what terms Margaret had at the time sought to break off the engagement which subsisted between them. The Earl of Bassentyne accordingly decided on perusing the letter; and he found that its contents were as follow:—

"You will be surprised, my lord, to find that I address you in these formal terms; but still more surprised perhaps must you be at the first opening of this letter, to find that it contains the ring which three days ago you placed on my finger! But do not judge me harshly: on the contrary, if you love me well, behave with a lofty generosity towards me! This I am sure that you will do, even when I tell you that I misjudged my own mind—I mistook the state of my own heart—I acted from an impulse, and not from a deeply-rooted sentiment. But I did not wilfully deceive you: I was labouring under an error when I plighted my troth and when I vowed that I would become thine! That I did veritably thus misinterpret the condition of my own heart, may be judged from the fact that all I said to you the other day was invested with solemnity, and therefore spoken with a real sincerity at the time. But I have since analyzed my feelings—I have reasoned with myself and I find that I misunderstood the sentiments which I entertain towards you. I fancied that a pure friendship must be identical with love, and that such feelings as a sister might entertain towards a brother were tinged with a more tender sympathy. I was wrong!—and in pledging myself to become thine, as well as in accepting your vow to become mine, I took a step which was very far from being calculated to ensure our mutual happiness. And you, my lord, with your fine intelligence and noble generosity, will admit that it is better I should now deal thus frankly with you, than suffer you to remain in the dark in reference to so important a subject. It is the happiness of two individuals which is at stake—thine and mine: and however recklessly I might play with mine own, yet it were unpardonable for me to jeopardize yours! No!—I will not do it! Therefore, even at the risk of incurring a less charitable interpretation than I herein beseech you to put upon my motives, I will earnestly entreat and implore that our engagement may here end at once and for ever. Nay, more!—by my own will I thus end it! Receive the assurance of my friendship for evermore; but the heart's love cannot be bestowed by an effort of the volition! Have I not said enough, my lord, to induce you, in all good grace and with befitting favour and forbearance, to receive back the ring which you placed upon my finger, and in return to restore me the ring which I placed upon thine? In conclusion, it were an insult to the magnanimity of your own heart, as well as to the gallantry of that Scottish chivalry whereof you are so bright an ornament, to appeal unto the delicacy of your feelings that all which has hitherto taken place betwixt us may be buried in profoundest secrecy. At the same time I may add that the bearer of this letter—worthy Master Stephen Cochrane—is to be fully trusted; and by him therefore may your lordship return me the ring which in a moment of error and of the heart's mistake I placed on your finger."

"MARGARET FITZ-ALLAN."

It was with the most painful feelings that the Earl of Bassentyne perused this letter; and more than once was he on the very point of dashing it upon the ground and spurning it beneath his foot.

"What!" he exclaimed, when he had finished the reading of the document; "she wrote me this letter on the very day when she was on the point of espousing the King!—and she would have deluded me into the belief that she was acting a frank and candid part towards me, whereas it was all the vilest selfishness and grossest hypocrisy! Ah, Margaret! Margaret! I thought that you were giddy and foolish—easily dazzled by the lustre of a crown,

so superior to that of a coronet: but I could not have fancied that you were so thoroughly heartless as I now know you to be! By St. Andrew! to have been thus jilted by you! O woman of inordinate ambition, never for a single instant did you even so much as suppose that you loved me! No, no! I now understand it all! You would have married the Earl of Bassentyne," he went on to exclaim in bitter tones, as he thus apostrophised the perfidious Margaret,—"you would have married the Earl of Bassentyne, because he could have given you rank and wealth: but on the instant that a King stepped forward to become your suitor, then farewell to the Earl! Had an Emperor subsequently made his appearance, it would doubtless have been farewell likewise to the King! Intense selfishness swayed thee, Margaret! personal aggrandisement was the paramount feeling of your heart!"

The veil had thus completely fallen from the eyes of the Earl of Bassentyne in respect to Margaret's character. As a matter of course he had long suspected it partially: he now understood it completely. Mingled disgust and indignation were in his soul: but not for a single instant did he think of wreaking a revenge, though the means were in his possession in the shape of that letter and of the ring. But far too magnanimous was Roland of Bassentyne to allow such a thought to take possession of him, even for a single instant; and he speedily began to experience a sentiment of commiseration and pity, now mitigating the disgust and indignation he had just before felt in reference, to the past conduct of Queen Margaret.

"I will acquit myself fully of this mission which I have undertaken on her behalf," he said to himself: "and then away to my own peaceful abode, where I shall now experience but little difficulty in banishing for ever from my heart the image of one who is as perfidious as she is beautiful!"

The Earl of Bassentyne was about to issue forth from the clump of trees, when he thought to himself, "I must be guarded in my movements, or I may fall in with the King's party! Ah! whom have we there, gliding stealthily along the bottom of the glen? By St. Andrew, it is the dwarf!"

And sure enough, there was Mompesson at a little distance, evidently looking about with eagerness and anxiety in every direction,—now concealing himself behind a tuft of shrubs—next squatting like a toad under a fragment of crag,—in a word, playing the part of one who was looking for somebody under circumstances that required secrecy and caution.

The Earl of Bassentyne hastily wrapped the ring inside the letter; he then carefully tied the envelope with the silken cord which was attached thereto; and as the wax which was used in those times was the same soft material which was so used for tapers, he had nothing to do but to press the broken parts together with his finger and make a new stamp with his own signet-ring. Having done this, he peeped forth from the knot of trees, and called Mompesson by name. The dwarf started and glanced quickly around, until his looks settled on the disguised person of the nobleman who was thus summoning him. In less than a minute Mompesson was by the Earl's side in the midst of the clump of trees.

"Ah, my lord! is it indeed you?" ejaculated the dwarf. "Your disguise is admirable! You do indeed look like a wandering minstrel in that long dark gabardine, and with the lute strung over your shoulder! But what tidings, my lord—for doubtless you may guess that it is for you I was in search."

"Indeed?" cried the Earl; and he severely scru-

tinised the countenance of the dwarf: "you were in search of me? And pray who may have sent you?"

"In good sooth, a pretty question, my lord!" replied Mompesson, who unflinchingly met the Earl's survey. "Who should send me but your lordship's ladye-love, the fair damosel who a fortnight back despatched me with the summons to your castle—which summons you did forthwith obey in the most gallant and knightly style. I mean pretty Mistress Marion Galbraith."

"Tis well, Mompesson," replied the Earl. "But what saw you from the depth of the glen that you were creeping along so stealthily?"

"A sight which made me for an instant tremble lest it was your lordship's own precious self that I beheld!" answered Mompesson. "Saw you not the King and a party of his guard—"

"Yes—and another person also," rejoined the Earl.

"Ah, well," continued the dwarf: "who that other person may be, I cannot say: but certain it is that he is now playing the singular, but not altogether unusual part of a human acorn suspended to a stately oak-tree."

"Indeed! is it so?" ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne.

"I have just seen it with my own eyes," responded the dwarf. "Ah! the terror that swept through me as I saw the human weight drawn up by the stout cord, the hough serving as a pulley! Thanks to that huge stone beneath which I crouched, I remained concealed from the view of the King and the royal guards. But hasten, my lord! what message, token, or missive have you for Mistress Marion Galbraith?"

"Take this packet," answered the Earl of Bassentyne; "conceal it most carefully about your person! use all possible caution, I implore you!—and give it secretly and privately into the hands of the young lady whom you have named."

"I will do so, my lord," replied Mompesson. "Have you any further commands?"

"None," returned Roland. "Ah! tell me, was my visit to the Castle spoken of?—did Lady Galbraith and her servitor Quincey—"

"They questioned not me, my lord," rejoined Mompesson; "neither was Mistress Marion in any way troubled on the point by her mother."

"Tis well!" ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne. "Here, worthy dwarf! accept this guerdon for the service you are now rendering me—and get you back with all possible speed to the Castle. Doubtless the presence of the King in this neighbourhood may not be known there—"

"Perhaps not, my lord," interjected Mompesson, with an air as if he were somewhat surprised at the remark. "But that has got nothing to do with the amatory correspondence which your lordship sustains with Mistress Marion Galbraith."

Having thus spoken—and without waiting for any reply—Mompesson glided away from amidst the clump of trees: he reached the huge stone, from behind which he again peeped forth—and he now observed that the royal party were moving away from the spot where the execution had taken place. Mompesson made another dart forward in the direction of the castle; and he disappeared, behind a tuft of bushes, from the view of the Earl of Bassentyne.

The nobleman watched from the clump of trees until he beheld the King's party enter amidst the thicket where they had left their horses, as described in the opening of this chapter. Roland then quitted his hiding-place, and made direct for a little cave at a distance of about a quarter of a mile.

There he had left his horse banqueting upon a quantity of grass which he had gathered for the animal's regalement. Throwing off the gabardine which he had worn as a disguise, and which had a large hood, or cowl, he appeared in a suit of complete armour, with the exception of the helmet, which he had left in this cave. Having put on the steel head-piece, he was just on the point of leading his horse forth from the cavern, when he heard the heavy trampling of steel-clad feet close by: and in a moment he was confronted by a warrior armed in complete panoply, like himself.

"Ah, my Lord of Bassentyne!" exclaimed that individual, at once recognising the nobleman.

But this recognition was not mutual: for Roland could not recollect that he had ever before seen the warrior who thus accosted him. His age was apparently verging towards forty: his features were handsome—his figure was well and strongly built; and he wore a suit of armour which being of the very plainest fashion, afforded no clue either to his rank or nation. Yet by the darkness of his hair and eyes, and the general expression of his countenance, he did not seem to be a Scot.

"Yes, sir stranger," said Roland; "I am the Earl of Bassentyne. But you? I recollect you not—"

"No—it is scarcely possible that you should recollect me," interjected the warrior, in a thoughtful manner; "for where we met, it could scarcely have happened that I should have been pointed out to you; whereas, on the contrary, you, as a great nobleman, were pointed out to me."

"And where did we thus meet?" inquired Roland: "or rather I should ask, where have you seen me before? There is a significance in your speech—"

"It was at Dumbarton Castle, upwards of three years ago," replied the warrior, "that you were pointed out to me."

"Ah! at Dumbarton?" ejaculated the Earl; for all in a moment had the mention of that fortalice revived the many painful memories associated with Margaret and her perfidy towards himself. "But your name, sir stranger?"

"No matter my name at present," was the response. "Let me ask how it is that the Earl of Bassentyne is thus loitering with evident stealthiness in the neighbourhood of Castle Urquhart?"

"By heaven!" cried Roland, his countenance crimsoning with indignation, "do you dare take upon yourself the part of a querist in respect to my actions or proceedings?"

"Was it not once rumoured that the Earl of Bassentyne had paid his court to a certain lady who was plain Mistress Margaret Fitz-Allan at the time?—and does it not therefore now seem suspicious," continued the stranger-warrior, "that this same Earl should be lurking beneath the disguise of a minstrel's gabardine?"

"By St. Andrew!" interrupted Roland; "fain were I to cross swords with you, that this insolence of thine might be summarily chastised,—but that there is a strange significance blended with mystery in your looks and speech! Moreover, not for another instant must the fame of that august lady remain under aspersion! Therefore, believe me when as a belted Earl and a true Knight I swear unto you that I harbour neither impure thought nor unholy design in reference to Queen Margaret. I was about to leave the neighbourhood—"

"Enough, my lord!" interrupted the warrior. "I thank you for the courtesy which has vouchsafed explanation; and I now offer all seemly excuses for my apparent rudeness in putting certain questions or venturing on particular remonstrances to your lordship. As for me, I am humble and obscure—"

mine is a name that it were scarcely worth while to mention—"

"Nay—but this turn will not serve you!" cried the Earl of Bassentyne, laying his hand upon his sword: "you shall give me your name!"

"Halt, my lord! be not impetuous or impatient!" said the stranger. "If we mean to demand explanations of one another, either at the sword's point or by the more courteous use of our tongues, I am willing to give you the choice betwixt the alternatives. But let there be explanation for explanation!"

"I do not comprehend you," interjected Roland.

"I will tell your lordship my name," responded the stranger-warrior; "and then it shall be your turn to answer the next query. Afterwards I hold myself bound to reply to the next question which you may think fit to put."

"By St. Jude, this is a strange compact!" cried the Earl of Bassentyne, who, despite his numerous causes for seriousness, and even gloominess, could not prevent himself from smiling at the proceedings of the other. "We seem as if we were both wishing to become friends, and yet we are within a hair's-breadth of drawing our weapons upon each other; while it is equally patent to me that you are incapable of the discourtesy of putting queries through mere idle curiosity. Now then, I will give you encouragement to speak farther; and to whatsoever I may have previously said I will add this little piece of information,—that so far from entertaining any dishonourable thought in reference to the Queen, I am engaged in a little secret correspondence with one of her handmaidens, through the medium of a good-natured dwarf—"

"What! a dwarf?" ejaculated the stranger, with a sudden start: "a dwarf say you? His name? his name?"

"Mompesson," responded the Earl, who was startled if not actually affrighted by the sudden change which took place in the tone and look of his new acquaintance.

"Mompesson?" echoed the latter. "And you believe him to be good-hearted! Oh, my lord! if it be worth that hideous wretch's while to betray you, rest assured he will do it!"

"Just heaven! is this so?" cried Roland, now turning very pale. "But tell me, in the name of everything sacred! why do you entertain such an evil opinion—"

"Concerning that vile dwarf?" exclaimed the stranger. "Because I am convinced that he is here for some treacherous purpose! He has for years been in the service of one who is a mortal enemy of Queen Margaret!"

"Holy saints!" groaned the Earl, staggering back a pace or two: "what monstrous mischief may now be consummated! And the King here in the neighbourhood!"

"Ah! then, my lord," ejaculated the stranger vehemently, "it is after all the Queen herself who is compromised!—compromised by you! But I am sworn to defend her!"

"Who are you? who are you?" demanded Roland. "Speak! tell me! I take heaven to witness that I will assist you to the very utmost!—I will lay down my life to repair whatsoever mischief I may have done! And moreover I swear it was to help Queen Margaret's cause that I have been playing a particular part! Tell me who you are, sir stranger! for I am a man of honour, and to be trusted!"

"Enough, my lord," said the warrior, taking the Earl's hand and pressing it warmly. "I am Sir Conrad Rossel, a Knight of the most holy and chivalrous Order of the Teutons."

"Ah!" ejaculated Roland, fervidly returning that



pressure: "I comprehend it all! You are an agent of the high and mighty Prince de Salza?"

"I am," was the response. "And now let there be no secrets between us."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE KING AT URQUHART CASTLE.

MOMPESSEON had disappeared from the view of the Earl of Bassent ne, behind the tuft of shrubs; but beyond that point he did not pursue his way towards the Castle. Creeping in amidst the bushes, like some loathsome hideous creature of the reptile species, he proceeded to unfasten the packet with the utmost care, in order that he might be enabled to close it again without much injury to its original appearance. He saw the ring, which bore the cipher of Roland of Bassentyne upon it; and he read the letter. He chuckled with joy,—for a few moments he gleefully agitated his form about in the midst of the bushes as if it were a snake that was disporting and gambolling there: but suddenly becoming tranquil, he muttered, "So, ho! this is an important prize! And now worthy Mompesson shall make his way into the favour of the King!"

With the most delicate nicety did he close the packet again; and with a little trouble he so united the disrupted waxen seal that it could only have been a very closely scrutinizing look that might have discovered how it had been tampered with. Then he peeped forth from his hiding place; and he beheld the King, with his attendants, riding slowly along the glen—coming from the distant thicket—and winding round the base of the eminence midway up whose ascent Stephen Cochrane was dangling to a tree.

There was a deep gloom upon the Monarch's countenance; for he repented of the step which he had so rashly and precipitately taken with respect to Cochrane. His rage had been fearfully excited at the time; and having for upwards of three long years cherished a burning vindictiveness against his former servitor for the part which the man had played towards him in respect to Margaret, he had suffered his furious hatred to get the better of him when a pretext so abruptly presented itself for wreaking it. But scarcely had the lifeless form of Cochrane dangled before his eyes, when David was struck with the impolicy of the action. He saw, now that it seemed to be too late, how Cochrane might possibly have proved of the utmost use in forwarding his designs against Margaret by acting as a witness in respect to the exchange of rings between herself and Roland of Bassentyne. For even if the letter and the ring which David had so much desired to possess, were not at the moment forthcoming, Cochrane might have nevertheless aided the royal intrigues by other means. Thus was it that the King's countenance wore a gloomy frown as he now rode through the glen; and he muttered to himself, "I must proceed to the Castle: but how shall I treat Margaret? Has she again outwitted me by some incomprehensible means or another?—or may I begin to perform the part of accuser?"

David and his attendants were pursuing their way, when all of a sudden a hideous ill-shapen being was seen gliding towards them.

"By my sceptre, it is Mompesson!" ejaculated David, reining in his horse.

"At your Majesty's service," replied the dwarf, sinking upon one knee and making a low obeisance.

"One would almost be inclined to think, in ordinary circumstances," said David, "that no bird could possibly by his appearance portend a worse

omen than you, Master Mompesson. But I have reason to believe it is otherwise, and that you deserve friendly words from my lips. Is it so?"

"I doubt not, sire," rejoined the dwarf, "but that I shall be enabled to give adequate testimony of my devotion to your Highness. But I would fain speak to your Grace alone."

"Be it so!" said the King: and he made a signal for his attendants to fall back—which they quickly did, so as to place themselves beyond earshot. "And now what tidings have you to communicate, worthy dwarf?" inquired the Monarch.

"May it please your Highness," answered Mompesson, knowing that kings have but little patience for tedious prefaces, "it seems to me that I cannot do better than place this packet in your royal hand."

"A packet?" ejaculated David. "Whence comes it? But stop! methinks there is an enclosure!"—and he at once tore open the envelope. "A ring!—and by St. Andrew, the cipher of Roland of Bassentyne! And a letter!"—then as he recognised the writing, he hastily ran his eye over its contents. "Why! this is indeed important! The very packet I was in quest of! How happened this, my worthy little friend?"

"May it please your Highness," answered the dwarf, "I just now received it from the Earl of Bassentyne."

"Ah! is it so?" cried David. "But the Earl—how came he by the packet?"

"He told me not, sire, by what means he became possessed of it," rejoined Mompesson. "He bade me take it and bear it quickly."

"To whom?" demanded the Monarch, with vehement abruptness.

"To Mistress Marion Galbraith, sire," was the response.

"Then why have you placed the packet in my hand?" asked David, keenly scrutinizing the dwarf's countenance.

"Because, sire," replied Mompesson, bowing, "I thought that the packet would be better in your Grace's possession than in that of any one else."

"Ah! then you knew—keen-witted imp that thou art!" cried David, "that Mistress Marion Galbraith serves but as an intermediary and a go-between in reference to the Earl of Bassentyne and—and—"

"Yes, sire: your Majesty has divined my thoughts," Mompesson hastened to interject.

David reflected for a few moments; and then securing the letter and the ring about his person, he said, "'Tis well, worthy dwarf! You shall be rewarded. And perhaps we may in other matters make your services available—"

"In which case, sire," rejoined Mompesson, "it would perhaps be as well that your Highness should forbear from mentioning that 'twas I who placed that packet in your Grace's hand—at least if I am to continue beneath the roof of yon castle and perform a special part."

"True!" ejaculated the King: "you have spoken wisely. But what tale will you tell on your own account to those within the castle-walls?"

"Trust to me, sire," rejoined the dwarf, "to have my excuses ready."

"Well, look you, Mompesson!" cried the King. "I am about to strike a blow which shall make certain high personages prisoners within yon walls: but it will be needful that there should be one to keep incessant watch, so that there may be no communication betwixt themselves and their friends outside—no bribing of sentinels—no throwing of letters over the parapets—"

"I understand, sire," interjected the dwarf; "and your Grace can trust me."

"But on the other hand," continued David, "you, Mompesson, may pretend to act as an intermediary betwixt those within and those without;—and thus you may be enabled to furnish me with an account from time to time of such proceedings as it may be useful for me to learn. You understand me? for I see that you were not ill tutored by the noble mistress who sent you hither."

Thus speaking, the King tossed a well filled purse to the dwarf, who snatched it up with many grotesque salutations and with fervidly expressed assurances of gratitude. He then glided away—passed through a thicket of shrubs—and in an incredibly short space of time he was seen bounding and leaping amidst the acclivities on the summit of which stood Castle Urquhart, so that he reached the entrance long before the King and his followers, inasmuch as the cavalcade had to pursue a winding path in order to attain the castle-gate.

All the proceedings which we have been relating, —the execution of Cochrane, the glidings of Mompesson in the glen, his meeting with the Earl of Bassentyne, and his subsequent encounter with the King,—were all too remote from the castle to be observed from the ramparts or windows. Margaret was pacing to and fro in her own apartment, waiting with the utmost anxiety for some tidings in reference to the Earl of Bassentyne's intended encounter with Stephen Cochrane; while Marion Galbraith was with equal anxiety on the look-out for Mompesson's return. She had despatched him into the glen that he might fall in the way of Roland and become the bearer of whatsoever message that nobleman might have to forward: but in the secret depths of her own heart the beauteous Marion entertained the hope that the Earl would send to make an appointment with herself, according to the species of promise which he had seemed to throw out when they had parted at the castle ten days back. At length Mompesson made his appearance; and Marion hastily followed the dwarf into his apartment.

"What tidings?" she anxiously demanded.

"Nothing favourable, Mistress Marion," replied Mompesson; "for though I saw the Earl of Bassentyne at a distance, yet I could not obtain speech of him."

"Not obtain speech of him?" ejaculated Marion. "But how did it thus happen?"

"The sudden appearance of his Majesty —"

"Ah! the King?" said Marion, turning pale; for amidst all the complications that now existed, and into which she had obtained more than a partial insight, the presence of David in the glen appeared to be fraught with evil omen.

"Yes," continued the dwarf: "and the arrival of his Highness has been signalized by an incident of somewhat a startling character; for whether it be a public punishment or a private vengeance —"

"Good heavens! what are you speaking of, Mompesson?" cried Marion, who every moment was becoming more and more affrighted.

"There is a knot of dense umbrageous trees half-way up the wood-crowned eminence yonder," rejoined the dwarf, approaching the window and pointing in the direction to which he alluded; "and to a bough of one of those trees is now swinging a human corpse!"

"Holy Virgin!" murmured the afflicted young lady, turning still more deadly pale than before, and staggering back a pace or two as if she were about to fall: "you do not mean—you do not mean—that Roland—the Earl I would say—"

"No, no, fair Mistress Marion! cheer up!" ejaculated the dwarf. "It was precisely because the King's party was in the glen, that the Earl adopted

the discreet course of betaking himself off: for though he is only paying his court to you, young lady, yet 'tis evident there are reasons which induce him to act cautiously and prudently, into which reasons I do not seek to pry."

"No, no, worthy Mompesson!" exclaimed Marion, who had just experienced an immense relief by the assurance that it was not Roland of Bassentyne who had become a victim to the King's vengeance; "you are all discretion and goodness! you are kindness itself. But you say that the King is in the glen?"

"Yes, and approaching the castle," rejoined the dwarf. "In a few moments he will be here. I sped back to tell you this."

"And the man who has suffered so terrible a fate?" inquired Marion, while a shudder passed through her form. "Was it—was it —"

"I know not who it was," replied Mompesson. "The work was quickly done—I beheld it from a distance—methinks too that a wild cry was wafted to my ear—"

"I must away to the Queen!" ejaculated Marion: and she disappeared from Mompesson's presence.

Away sped the young lady to Margaret's apartment; and in a few moments everything she had learnt from the dwarf's lips was communicated to her royal mistress. Margaret was seized with consternation. It was evidently Stephen Cochrane who had become the victim of David's revenge:—but was it an accidental circumstance that the King should have fallen in with him there? or had David been forewarned that his former servitor was to be on that spot on a particular day and at a special hour? If the latter were the case, then there must be a traitor somewhere. But who could this be? Marion *only* was present at the interview between Margaret and the Earl; and it was impossible that Marion could be a traitress! Not for a single instant did the Queen's suspicion fall upon Lady Galbraith: for she knew not that her ladyship had met the Earl as he was leaving the royal apartment:—the wily woman had kept her own counsel; and Mompesson had never obeyed the Earl of Bassentyne's injunction to warn Marion Galbraith that her mother's suspicions had been seriously excited.

Bewilderment therefore blended with consternation in the mind of Queen Margaret. Could Roland of Bassentyne have been a traitor after all? could he have betrayed her? had he dissembled when in her presence, in order that he might all the more effectually wreak a terrible revenge that was secretly meditated? No, no! it was impossible!—and scarcely was the suspicion conceived in Margaret's mind, when it was indignantly rejected. Yes!—it required but a moment to enable her to render that amount of justice to the noble character and the magnanimous disposition of the Earl of Bassentyne.

Nor had she any leisure for wild and useless conjecture:—a presentiment told her that a storm was about to burst above her head. Marion Galbraith, perceiving what an effect her communications had just produced upon Margaret, burst into tears; and seizing the hand of her royal mistress, she conveyed it to her lips, faltering forth, "Oh, what can now be done to serve you, dear lady? Tell me! tell me! You know that I am ready to lay down my life in your service!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Margaret, as the trampling of several steeds in the court-yard below reached her ears. "Here is the King! Dry your tears, my dear friend!—let us seem calm and composed! We know not in what humour he comes! Perhaps my alarms may be unfounded after all!"

"Heaven grant that they may!" murmured

Marion, as she rapidly passed her handkerchief across her beautiful eyes.

She then hastened to place herself with her tambour-work on a settee in a corner of the apartment; while Margaret assumed an easy, negligent, lounging position upon a sofa: but it was a posture that was replete with elegance and grace. And at the same time, by one of those strong efforts of the will which she had been compelled to exercise on many occasions during the last three or four years of her life, she composed her countenance, and she nerved herself to meet whatsoever tempest might be about to burst. For though she had just said that "possibly her alarms might be unfounded," yet the remark was made rather to console Marion than because she herself believed that she was really warranted in giving utterance to it. No!—for still strong in Margaret's mind was the presentiment that some terrible evil was now impending!

Minutes were passing away: they grew into a quarter of an hour—and the King made not his appearance in Margaret's suite of apartments. Another quarter of an hour—and still the Queen was alone with Marion Galbraith. What did this mean? Margaret knew not how to interpret the circumstance, whether for the best or for the worst. She continued full of anxiety and suspense, though now outwardly wearing a calm dignified demeanour.

At length footsteps were heard approaching—the door was thrown open—and King David made his appearance, followed by Lady Galbraith and the Lord Chazaberlain. A glance at her royal husband's countenance convinced Margaret that her present fears had only been too well founded, and that a storm was veritably about to burst above her head. Nevertheless it was not for her to display what might be construed into an anticipation of evil arising from a consciousness of some past levity or misdeed; and rising therefore from her seat with a half-smile upon her countenance, she said, "Ah, has my royal husband returned—after an absence of some months?"

"Silence!" exclaimed the King sternly: "the time for a hypocritical display of feelings has passed away. Everything is known!"

"What words are these," demanded Margaret, drawing herself up with the haughtiest dignity,— "what words are these, I ask, which your Majesty is addressing to me? Everything is known! There is nothing in my life that I would wish to remain unknown to my husband or to all the world."

"What?" ejaculated the King, the fires of mingled malignity, and rage, and vindictive triumph, flashing in his eyes; "would you wish it to be known that exactly three days before you knelt at my side at the altar, you had most solemnly and sacredly plighted and betrothed yourself to the Earl of Bassentyne?"

With a marvellous steadiness of look—with unblenching countenance—and with a complete retention of that haughty dignity which just stopped short of the point where it would become open defiance, Margaret received the first outbreak of the storm.

"Sire," she answered, in a voice that was completely calm, "if you choose to tax your recollections you will scarcely fail to remember that at the Abbey of Holyrood, when I presented myself to your Grace to invoke your aid on behalf of the Earl of Caithness, I told you that my hand was honourably sought and my heart tenderly wooed by the Earl of Bassentyne."

"Aye! but you did not tell me," cried the King, "that the matter had gone so far or become so serious as to reach the point whereat there was exchanging of rings in proof of solemn betrothal? Why, woman! when you knelt by my side at the

altar, every vow you uttered was a foul perjury in respect to your plighted to the Earl of Bassentyne!"

"These are harsh words, sire," responded Margaret, still calm and dignified in outward appearance; "and they are such as kingly or knightly courtesy never before permitted the tongue to address unto a lady. But let that pass! I wish, sire, that by any chance you could have read the letter which I penned to the Earl of Bassentyne at the time whereunto you are alluding. You would see——"

"I should see," exclaimed David, vehemently, "that you dealt towards him with a vile and consummate hypocrisy, as you dealt likewise towards me! The letter indeed! I have it! It is here!" and tearing forth the document from the bosom of his doublet, the King held it up before Margaret's eyes.

"Ah!" she said, with affected astonishment, "it is indeed my letter!—and despite the cruel interpretation your Grace puts upon its contents, I am glad that they have come to your knowledge."

"Enough! no more of this base dissimulation!" thundered forth the King. "Why, even now, woman, that your ambition has been gratified, your affections are flowing back into their original channel; and by the stealthy visits of Roland of Bassentyne within these walls, may I judge of the very worst in respect to your honour and mine own!"

"Sire!" ejaculated Margaret, as the deepest crimson mantled upon her cheeks.

But she stopped short: for Marion Galbraith, gliding forward from the corner where she had hitherto seemed to be bending over her tambour-work, threw herself at the King's feet, exclaiming with passionate vehemence, "No, sire, no! her Majesty is innocent! It is I who am guilty! It was to visit me in secrecy and stealthiness, that Roland of Bassentyne came hither! It the honour of any one be compromised or lost, it is mine!"

Margaret's heart swelled with an indescribable emotion at this noble endeavour of the magnanimous girl to sacrifice herself in order to avert the storm from the mistress whom she loved.

"Daughter!" exclaimed Lady Galbraith, darting forward, her large dark eyes flashing fire; "how dare you thus proclaim yourself a wanton when 'tis a falsehood wherewith you are taking away your own character!"

"The scene is a pretty and a pathetic one," ejaculated the King, with a sneer; "but it will not answer the purpose! Your reputation is unstained, pretty Mistress Marion; for I happen to know enough to be enabled to acquit you of your own self-accusation. Your ladyship would do well," added David, turning towards the mother, "to take special charge of this daughter of yours."

"Come with me, girl," said Lady Galbraith, sternly.

"No, no!" cried Marion. "I will not be separated from my dear mistress!"

"By heaven!" ejaculated the King, "I am master here, as well as on every other spot on Scottish soil!—and I will be obeyed! Young damsel, leave the room with your mother—I command you!"

Queen Margaret's form dilated with rage, and the upper row of snowy teeth were for a moment seen biting deep into the lower lip: she was on the very point of bursting forth into rebellious defiance of her husband's authority in that apartment. But she controlled herself: she at once saw the impolicy of aggravating the difficulties of her position;—she therefore said, "Go, dear Marion, for the present: obey your King and your mother! Go, dear girl!"—and the tone in which these words were uttered, conveyed all the gratitude which Margaret experienced towards the damsel for her magnanimous devotion.

"And now," said the King, as the door closed behind Lady Galbraith and Marion, "I have only to announce to your Grace that you are for the present to hold and consider yourself a prisoner——"

"A prisoner?" echoed Margaret, a strong spasm shooting visibly over her superb form, and her magnificent black eyes darting forth vivid lightnings.

"Yes—a prisoner!" repeated David emphatically. "It is now the King who, so to speak, is avenging the husband! Yes—you are a captive here, until measures can be taken to submit to a proper tribunal the points at issue between us.—My lord," added David, turning towards the Chamberlain, "you are the witness of the words which have gone forth from my lips; and I hereby appoint you Governor of this castle and custodian of the person of Queen Margaret."

Having thus spoken, David turned abruptly upon his heel and quitted the apartment. Margaret sprang one pace forward to retain him while she should give utterance to all the words that were swelling up tumultuously into her throat: but her surging emotions suddenly seemed as if about to suffocate her—sickness seized upon her heart and confusion on her brain. She just caught a glimpse of the Lord Chamberlain making her a profound obeisance at the threshold of the door; and then she tottered towards a seat, on which she sank down—not exactly deprived of consciousness, nor in a positive fainting fit—but in a state of numbness and stupor that was but one degree below complete inanimation.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE EARL AND THE KNIGHT.

LET us return to the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Conrad Rossel, whom we left together in a secluded part of Glen Urquhart, but at no very considerable distance from the castle itself. We left them also at the moment when the Teutonic warrior had revealed his name to the Scottish Earl, and when they had come to a mutual understanding that there should be no secrets between them.

"And now, my lord," said Sir Conrad, "it will perhaps be as well if you postpone your departure for a brief space."

"Postpone it?" ejaculated the Earl. "I no longer dream of departure, now that I have learnt from your lips that the dwarf Mompesson is a traitor! But tell me what reason—what motive——"

"Did I not ere now proclaim," said the Teutonic warrior, "that this Mompesson has for years been in the service of one who is a mortal enemy of Queen Margaret?"

"Yes, yes! I now bethink me that such was the mode of your speech!" ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne. "But who is this enemy of the Queen's? who is it that could have employed the dwarf for treacherous purposes against her?"

"A woman," answered Rossel, gloomily; "and therefore you may perhaps guess, my lord, that there may have been love and jealousy in the case——"

"Do you allude to some mistress of the King in past times?" inquired the Earl.

"So report says," rejoined Rossel; "and unfortunately I know that this same report speaketh the truth. I allude to the Countess of Morton."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne. "The Countess of Morton, who some while ago journeyed into Scotland, disguised as an English knight—wearing the style and title of Sir Louis Carlyon?"

"The same! the same, my lord!" interjected Conrad Rossel. "She borrowed my name for the nonce—but this is a secret betwixt you and me——"

"I do not understand you," interrupted the Earl. "I beseech you to speak plainly! The Countess borrowed your name?"

"Yes, my lord—it is only too true," rejoined the Teutonic warrior; "for though during some years past I have borne the name of Conrad Rossel, yet if I had never abjured my lawful and family nomenclature, I should be Sir Louis Carlyon until this day. In a word, my lord, I am the brother of the Countess of Morton," added Conrad, with the half-fierce, half-sullen air of one who is forced by circumstances to make a most painful revelation.

An ejaculation of astonishment burst from the lips of the Earl of Bassentyne; and then, as many circumstances connected with the past rushed to his memory, and as he also remembered that the Countess of Morton was now a widow, he cried, "Is it possible that Mompesson is intriguing on your sister's behalf, to work mischief against Queen Margaret?"

"It can be scarcely otherwise," answered Conrad. "But now tell me, in the name of all the saints, my lord! what is it that you have just done which may so seriously compromise the Queen?—how is it that you have placed yourself in Mompesson's power? and why did you groan and stagger ere now when you learnt the true character of this hideous dwarf?"

The Earl reflected for a few moments; and then he said, "If I tell you everything, Sir Conrad, my confidence will be trenching on secrets which are far from being altogether mine own."

"They must necessarily relate to the Queen, my lord," exclaimed Rossel: "but I have already told you sufficient to prove that I myself am devoted to the cause of Margaret! I will tell you more if necessary. When upwards of three years ago Prince de Salza was about to take his departure from Scotland, after having witnessed the acknowledgment of Margaret as Scotland's Queen at Dumbarton Castle, he bade me remain on Caledonia's soil to watch over the interests of that august lady, without seeming to do so—to be near her without being seen—to maintain a watchful eye over the proceedings of the King—and in case of need, to take any measures that circumstances might suggest. Thus, though a belted knight, do you behold me clad in a suit of plainest panoply; and indeed throughout my entire sojourn in Scotland, from the date when I received that important mission, I have studied to disguise myself in various ways, and to render my appearance as little remarkable as possible."

"And have you all this time," inquired the Earl, "for three years and upwards, maintained a watch over the Queen's interests and the King's proceedings?"

"I will give your lordship a few more words of explanation," replied Sir Conrad Rossel; "and then will you be all the better inclined to vouchsafe me your completest confidence. For three years did naught arise to require the slightest intervention on my part; and thus I was all the better enabled to conceal the mission which I had received from Prince de Salza. In a word, my lord, no one, I believe, has ever suspected that any retainer of that prince remained in Scotland when he took his departure. But though for three whole years everything appeared to progress so tranquilly and so well, yet at the end of that period there were some indications of a change. The King paid the last instalment of the ransom-money which he owed to the English Government; and at the very

same time he absented himself from Queen Margaret. I suspected that this date would prove the era of a new line of policy on David's part; and I secretly followed him to Edinburgh. There I learnt, by means which I need not tarry to explain—unless it be by a hint to the effect that even among the privy councillors of the King there are those who are susceptible of the influence of gold——

"Yes!" interjected the Earl; "there is doubtless venality even in the highest places! But proceed, I beseech you, Sir Knight."

"I was about to observe, my lord," continued Sir Conrad Rossel, "that I succeeded in learning how the King had already formed a design to conclude a permanent treaty of peace with England, and thus dispense with the alliance of Prince de Salza and the Teutons. In a word, I considered that matters were beginning to look so grave that it had become expedient for me to obtain additional instructions from my august master. A Teutonic page who had remained with me in Scotland, had recently died: I had no trustworthy messenger to employ—and I therefore resolved to journey in person to Marienburg and there communicate with the illustrious Prince de Salza. I concluded that during the few weeks of my absence nothing of any considerable importance was at all likely to transpire—or that after a happy, or at least a tranquil interval of three years, the Queen's wedded life would be destined to experience any sudden storm. To be brief, I repaired to Marienburg and duly made my report to Prince de Salza. His Highness at once perceived that it now became more than ever necessary to watch over the interests of Queen Margaret; and he bade me return without loss of time to Scotland. But I need not inform your lordship that it is a long journey to achieve; and moreover I was delayed in respect to the obtaining of a pass age on board a vessel from Holland. The result was that it was only a fortnight ago that I again set foot on Caledonian soil, after an absence of some ten or eleven weeks. Then did I learn that in the meanwhile my sister, the Countess of Morton, had become a widow, and I liked not altogether the rumour which prevailed relative to her husband's death."

"Does your sister," inquired the Earl of Bassentyne, "know that you have tarried thus long in Scotland?"

"She is utterly without suspicion on the point," replied Sir Conrad. "I have never seen her since we separated upwards of three years ago in the neighbourhood of Dumbarton Castle. You may easily suppose, my lord, that when I came back to Scotland the other day and learnt that during my absence the Countess had visited Dalkeith—that the castle itself had been splendidly refurnished—and that she had received the King there, I was alike astonished and grieved. Yes, and I felt indignant too!—for alas! my lord, it is said to be compelled to look upon one's own sister as a wanton! And in addition to all those reports, I learnt that the Earl of Morton had died a violent death at his residence near Carlisle; and I resolved to ascertain additional particulars on the subject."

"Good heavens!" cried the Earl; "you did not suspect—No! surely your sister is incapable of such deep, deep wickedness as that?"

"My lord," rejoined Conrad, with a gloomy look, but with a firm voice, "I am giving you my confidence without reserve or constraint; and truth compels me to declare that I am cursed in respect to the family to which I belong; so that I was justified in suspecting anything with regard to my sister Louisa. This is a sad revelation to make; but I am speaking with all candour and frankness.

Away I sped to Carlisle; and secretly did I institute inquiries——"

"And what was the result?" asked the Earl. "I believe, from the rumour which reached my own ear, that the Countess was at Dalkeith at the time when her husband's death happened at Carlisle——was it not so?"

"Yes," responded Rossel; "and heaven be thanked that this was not the only circumstance which tended to relieve my mind from the horrible suspicion which had at first taken possession of it; for I believe there can be no doubt that the Earl of Morton committed suicide. He had bequeathed all his possessions to his wife, of whom he spoke in loving terms in his will; and thus it is not even to be surmised that any misconduct on her part had driven him to despair. But people spoke of some long existing and incurable disease——"

"Then your mind was relieved of an immense weight," interjected the Earl of Bassentyne; "and you found that you need not think worse of your sister than you had previously done? But Ah! what of the dwarf—the hideous Mompesson?"

"This is precisely the point to which I was coming," answered Conrad. "While secretly and privately instituting inquiries in the neighbourhood of the castellated edifice which for some time past the deceased Earl of Morton had occupied in the neighbourhood of Carlisle, I necessarily learnt many particulars in respect to household and domestic affairs. Amongst other things I was informed that the Countess was considered to be of a wild and eccentric character—wayward and volatile—but generous and good-tempered; and though it was deemed that there was a strange levity in her disposition, yet no direct accusations seemed to be levelled against her morality. She was famed as a huntress; and she often apparelled herself in male raiment. Amongst other proofs of eccentricity on her part, it was mentioned to me that she had in her service a hideous dwarf named Mompesson; and that this horrible-looking being was devotedly attached to his mistress. And also I may observe that it was incidentally mentioned to me how the Countess had flown in the face of public opinion some few years back, by taking into her service two young girls of a lineage sufficiently repulsive—though report proclaimed their persons to be of singular loveliness."

"And what might this repulsive lineage have been?" asked the Earl of Bassentyne.

"One of the girls unto whom I am alluding," replied Sir Conrad, "was none other than the orphan daughter of the headsmen of Carlisle; and I need not observe, my lord, that there is an infamy attaching to such a parentage!—there is a foul taint in the blood of a daughter who sprang from such a stock! As for the other girl, she was likewise an orphan, and her lineage was not a whit more respectable than that of the first mentioned. Her father was a vile robber, who suffered death through his misdeeds; and it was supposed that he left his ill-got possessions to the headsmen of Carlisle as an inducement for this functionary to adopt the girl whom his own sword was to render an orphan. Thus the robber's daughter was brought up with the executioner's daughter; and when the executioner died in a destitute condition, the two girls became the objects of an apparent sympathy on the part of my sister the Countess of Morton."

"But this is somewhat a fine trait in the character of her ladyship!" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne; "and I confess that great is my astonishment to hear such a tale concerning one of whose name it is not even possible for you, though her brother, to speak in general terms with pride and respect."

"Ah, my lord!" returned Conrad Rossel; "if my sister had adopted those wretched girls through sheer sympathy and compassion, it would be different, and we might regard the incident as a saving clause in Louisa's favour. But in this light it is impossible to survey it! The defiance which she hurled at society when she took such beings into her service, was not a noble sacrifice which she was making for humanity's sake; but it was in reality a cold worldly calculation. Yes—I can fathom full easily what her purpose must have been. She thought that by the display of a seeming eccentricity, she would succeed in investing all her irregularities with the same character; so that no one should speak of the vices of the Countess of Morton, but merely of her vagaries and peculiarities. And what a convenient mask for her to assume was that which the reputation for *singularity* afforded her! With such a repute she might assume the boldest hardihood—fortify herself with a brazen effrontery—and pursue a course which under other circumstances she would not dare to adopt. And then too, by taking into her service such girls as those, she found ready and willing instruments for all her plans and purposes:—at the very outset she attached them unto her interests by bonds of gratitude the strongest that can be conceived."

"Yes: I now comprehend!" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne. "It was indeed an astute and worldly-minded calculation on the part of your sister! And are those girls still with her?"

"I know not: I do not think that I asked the question," replied Sir Conrad. "The fact itself came accidentally as it were to my knowledge; and it belonged to a series of topics on which I had no particular inclination to dwell. To be brief, after having tarried for a few days in the neighbourhood of Carlisle, I journeyed hitherward once more. In this district I arrived yesterday, after an absence of upwards of three months, as I have already informed your lordship. Conceive my surprise when within an hour or two after my return amidst the wild and beautiful scenery of Glen Urquhart, I beheld a hideous dwarf in company with some of the royal pages: and by the description I had received of Mompesson at Carlisle, I was at once struck by the idea that it was this self-same Mompesson who had found his way into Glen Urquhart! Your lordship may readily suppose that I resolved to institute the earliest possible inquiries upon the point: but I had not been enabled to do so before I encountered you just now on this spot. Then your own words speedily confirmed the suspicion which was previously lurking in my mind in reference to Mompesson."

Sir Conrad Rossel ceased speaking: and the Earl of Bassentyne hastened to exclaim, "A thousand thanks, Sir Knight, for the candour with which all your explanations have been given; and it is a frankness for which I deem myself the more indebted, inasmuch as in making those revelations, you were compelled to speak disparagingly of your own sister! Not for another instant shall I hesitate to deal with equal sincerity and openness towards yourself."

The Earl of Bassentyne then entered upon all those details which were necessary to enable Sir Conrad Rossel to understand the exact position of affairs in reference to Queen Margaret. The Teutonic warrior listened with the deepest attention and interest; and when the narrative was concluded, he exclaimed, "By heaven, my lord, this is most serious! You gave the letter and the ring to that vile dwarf?"

"Alas, I did so!" replied the Earl. "How could I possibly suspect that he was a traitor?"

"No, no! you could not!" interrupted Rossel. "I am not blaming your lordship! But tell me, why in the name of all the blessed saints did you dream of returning those objects at all?—why restore them unto the hand of Queen Margaret? Was not the letter originally written to your lordship's own self? was it not addressed to you? and was it not therefore for your own especial keeping? And as for the ring, was it not one which bore your own cipher,—one which you yourself had upwards of three long years back placed on Margaret's finger,—one which she had meant to return to you, and which she thought had long ago been restored to your possession?"

"All this is true, Sir Knight," answered the Earl of Bassentyne; "and I will explain the object and motive of my proceedings. It appears that the villain Stephen Cochrane—whose corpse dangles amongst yonder trees—dared to hint unto Queen Margaret that I was embittered against her Majesty and secretly hostile towards her. All circumstances being considered, she might well have believed the tale: but yet she trusted to me! She confided to me the task of wresting that letter and that ring from the possession of Stephen Cochrane! Those articles fell into my hand—you already know by what means. How was I to act? I might have destroyed the letter and have replaced my signet-ring upon my finger. But methought that it was my bounden duty to prove to the Queen that her confidence had not been misplaced—that I was in reality her friend—that her mission had been fulfilled and that for no earthly inducement would I take advantage of any trust that might be reposed in me! It was my hope to meet Marion Galbraith for the purpose of conveying to the Queen those tokens of her safety in respect to Stephen Cochrane: but Mompesson came gliding towards me—he said that he was sent by Marion—and I believed him. I therefore confided to his hand the packet containing alike the letter and the ring."

"Had you sent the letter only, my lord," said Conrad Rossel, "it would have been sufficient. Wherefore return the ring also?"

"That ring, Sir Knight," responded the Earl of Bassentyne, mildly yet firmly, "was placed by my hand on Margaret's finger upwards of three years ago; and it this day came back into my possession by an accident. I did not consider that I was either authorized or bound to retain it:—I deemed that it was a requisite accompaniment to the letter, and must not be separated therefrom. Nay, more—I will unbosom myself of the whole truth to the uttermost verge," continued Roland. "That letter proved Margaret to be full of hypocrisy and dissimulation: my indignant blood was excited—my anger was aroused. In such a state of feeling I scorned to take back the ring which in other days and under other circumstances I had placed upon her finger;—and for this reason also I thought that the ring had better accompany the letter, so that Queen Margaret might deal with both as she should think fit."

"All that mingled ire and pride was natural enough on your lordship's part," observed Sir Conrad Rossel; "and it is useless to deplore the evil which cannot be undone. But what a mischievous power has now fallen into the hands of that vile dwarf, who I feel convinced can have insinuated himself into your castle for treacherous purposes only! We must consult, my lord, what is now best to be done."

"Would that I could obtain an interview with Marion Galbraith!" ejaculated Roland.

"Ah!" cried Sir Conrad Rossel. "Who comes hither? A female form! Behold how she stops

and looks anxiously around! Ah! she hastens onward again! By all the saints, 'tis one of the Queen's handmaidens! I have seen her riding in the royal cavalcade when I have been secretly watching at a distance!"

The young female had just at that instant caught sight of the Earl of Bassentyne; and with a wild cry of joy she came bounding towards him, while he on his part sped forward to meet her as she glidingly skirted along the adjacent grove.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

MAUDE, THE EARL, AND THE KNIGHT.

THE young maiden had evidently recognised the Earl of Bassentyne; and the instant Roland heard from Rossel's lips that she belonged to Queen Margaret's household, he was naturally smitten with the conviction that he was on the point of receiving some message from the interior of Castle Urquhart. The young female—who was exceedingly beautiful, and whose age might be two or three and twenty—was evidently labouring under the utmost excitement: and bounding towards the Earl, she ejaculated, "Oh, my lord! I am rejoiced that I have found you! I dreaded lest you should have left the glen!"

"You come from the Queen?" said Roland. "What has happened?"

But he stopped short; for at that very instant it struck him that the maiden's countenance was not altogether unfamiliar to him, and that he had somewhere seen those features before. At the same moment the damsel had glanced towards Conrad Rossel, as if wondering who he might be that the Earl of Bassentyne thus mentioned the Queen's name so freely in his presence.

"We have met before, maiden?" said Roland, fixing his eyes keenly upon her; "but where I know not. Perhaps you can assist my memory?"

"On two former occasions, my lord, have I seen you," was the damsel's answer,—"once at Dumbarton Castle, where I was in attendance on her Majesty during the memorable proceedings that there took place——"

"I recollect!" ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne. "But, Ah! the other occasion on which I saw you—was it not at Dalkeith Castle, when Prince de Salza, the young Lord of Liddesdale, and myself burst into the apartments leading into the oratory?"

"Yes, my lord," responded the damsel. "I was then in the service of the Countess of Morton?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Sir Conrad Rossel, now stepping forward. "In the service of the Countess of Morton?"—and his looks suddenly became full of suspicion and mistrust.

"Yes—on that occasion to which the Earl of Bassentyne has just alluded," rejoined the handmaiden: "but within a very few hours afterwards I devoted myself to the service of Queen Margaret."

"Did you happen to be one of a couple of damsels," abruptly demanded Sir Conrad Rossel, "who entered the service of the Countess at Carlisle? Ah! I recollect their names! Maude and Minnie were they called!—and they knew how to don the attire of pages!"

"I was one of those damsels," answered the young female; "and I am that same Maude whose name you have just mentioned:"—but she spoke in a slow hesitating manner, with a deep blush suffusing her countenance, and with a frightened look at the Teutonic warrior who was questioning her.

"Maude!" he exclaimed:—then, as a recollection struck him, he cried, "By heaven! I was about to make no very courteous allusion to your birth, my poor damsel!—but now that I bethink me, there was one of the Countess of Morton's handmaidens who rendered great service to Queen Margaret! I heard the tale from Prince de Salza's own lips when interceding with him on behalf of my sister."

"It was now Maude's turn to be astonished; and she exclaimed, "Ah! is it possible that you are the brother whom the Countess so unexpectedly fell in with in a moment of bitterness? The narrative reached my ears at the time——"

"Yes—I am he, damsel,—the brother of the Countess of Morton!" interjected Conrad Rossel. "But that I am no friend to my sister's machinations, whatever they have been or may now be, you may readily judge from the circumstance that I am here with my Lord of Bassentyne."

"Sir Conrad Rossel—for such I know to be the name which you bear in the Teutonic service," said Maude, suddenly acquiring a dignity of demeanour which struck the Earl and the Knight,— "words of such significance have fallen from your lips that it were impossible for me to misunderstand them. And assuredly I shall not affect to do so! Well then, Sir Knight, I at once admit that there is a terrible stigma upon my birth——"

"We will not refer to it!" ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne, who was far more generous-hearted than the Teutonic warrior; for the temper of the latter had been soured by the bitter experiences of the earlier portion of his life. "If you have served Queen Margaret faithfully——"

"That I have served her Grace faithfully," said Maude, "is sufficiently proved by the favour with which her Highness regards me. I hold the post of senior firewoman about the person of her Majesty——"

"Enough, young damsel!" interrupted Sir Conrad Rossel; "no further vindication of yourself is needed! Pardon me if I said aught to wound your feelings; but I am somewhat quick as well as uncouth of speech—and alas that I should be compelled to say it! My soul chafes bitterly whenever I am forced into contact as it were with any person who has ever been linked with my graceless sister."

"Ah, Sir Knight," ejaculated Maude, an expression of anguish passing over her countenance, "heaven knows how bitterly I have been made to feel the consequences of that fatal connexion! At this moment my soul is lacerated with remorse——"

"Remorse?" echoed the Earl of Bassentyne. "Ah, I comprehend, poor girl!—and I pity you! But if you are now penitent, you may atone for the irregularities of a past period of your life——"

"My lord," ejaculated the young woman, "you have misunderstood me! I am alluding to the present! Would to God that I were as guiltless now as in past years I have been! 'Tis true that a terrible stigma rests on my name!—true that the fearful avocation pursued by my sire has cast its sinister reflection upon the daughter whom he left behind him! But if I shudder and blush, my lord, to look in your face and confess that my father was the headsmen of Carlisle——" and she quivered visibly as she spoke the words—"yet on the other hand it is with an unflinching look I can meet your regards when I declare that suspicion has done me wrong if it have tarnished my maiden fame. Alas! I know full well that report *did* speak lightly of me ere I left Carlisle; and I confess that in the giddiness of my inexperienced years I was indifferent to what was said of me and took no trouble to give the lie to evil rumour. But was it astonishing that



having entered the service of such a mistress—saving your presence, Sir Knight,—was it astonishing, I ask, if having entered the service of such a mistress—assuming a page's attire—running like a madcap about the country—it should be deemed that I had laid aside all the delicacies of my sex, and that wildness, levity, and recklessness had merged into absolute depravity and dishonour? But I call all the blessed saints to witness that I remained pure and chaste despite evil examples and constant temptations! Yet bitterly, bitterly, am I now paying the penalties of all that levity, that recklessness, and that wildness which made me talked of as *Carlisle*!”

The damsel spoke with a volubility which would not be interrupted: it was an eloquence which derived its passion from the excited state of her feelings. At one moment there was dignity in her looks—at another there was anguish: but alike in her language and her demeanour there was an impressiveness which could not fail to make itself felt even by one who thought so lightly of the female sex as did Sir Conrad Rosel.

But while she was still speaking, a thought flashed to the Teutonic warrior's mind: he strove to break in upon the torrent of words that were gushing forth from her lips—but she would not permit him; and it was not until she had finished speaking that he was enabled to exclaim, “A truce to this self-vindication in reference to past matters! And tell us, young damsel, how it is that you, though so faithfully serving the Queen, have suffered a wretch like Mompesson to harbour for weeks past within the walls of Urquhart Castle?”

“Ah!” ejaculated Maude, an expression of indescribable agony again passing over her countenance: “that has been my great guilt! and it is for this that I experience such dire remorse!”

“What?” ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne; “you knew the villany of the dwarf's character—”

“Most certainly she did!” interrupted Conrad Rosel, with a slight sneer: “for was she not a while in the same service with Mompesson?—I mean in that of my graceless sister.”

“True!” exclaimed Roland: “this point demands explanation! But tell us, young damsel, wherefore you are now here? why have you come to seek me? who told you it was probable I should be found in the glen?”

“Ominous proceedings are taking place yonder,” cried Maude. “Oh! do not mistrust me—”

“Speak! speak!” exclaimed the Earl; “and prove to us that you are worthy of being trusted. What has happened at Castle Urquhart? The Queen—”

“Is a prisoner, my lord,” replied the damsel.

“Ah! a prisoner?” ejaculated the nobleman. “But proceed!”

“And Marion Galbraith has been torn from her royal mistress; and it is she who sent me to endeavour to find your lordship.”

“Marion sent you?” cried the Earl.

“Yes, my lord. The Queen is a prisoner, I repeat: and Oh! it is all on your lordship's account!”

“Ah! say you so?”—and the Earl started. “But alas! I feared as much!”

“The letter and the ring, my lord,” resumed the damsel, “which were found on the person of Stephen Cochrane—”

“Not so!” exclaimed the nobleman. “It is the villain Mompesson who has wrought all this mischief!”

“I feared—I feared it!” cried Maude, with a wild expression of grief upon her countenance:

“my soul's presentiment was to this dread effect! Oh, that heaven's thunder would strike me down! wretched, wretched being that I am!”—and she smote her bosom so violently that the Earl of Bassentyne was forced to seize her by the wrists and hold her arms, for fear lest she should do herself a mischief.

“You will see, my lord,” muttered Conrad Rosel, “that no good can possibly come to one who experienced such evil tuition as my graceless sister could afford.”

“Hush, Sir Knight!” hastily rejoined Roland in a whisper. “There is an unmistakable sincerity on the part of this young female—and we know that she must have deserved well of the Queen to be so high in her favour.”

“My lord,” she said, now dashing away the tears from her eyes, “it is a sad confession that I have to make! For three years did I faithfully serve the Queen; and heaven knows it was my desire to continue in the same devoted spirit of constancy and truth towards her Grace! But the dwarf made his appearance—he overawed me by horrible threats—he intimidated me with the most frightful menaces! Ah, cannot you comprehend how he had me in his power? I take all the holy saints to witness that if it had not been for the false representations he made—”

“In one word, damsel,” interrupted the Earl of Bassentyne, “did you suspect him to be a secret emissary of the Countess of Morton?”

“He vowed that he was no longer in her service!—he deluded and bewildered me at one time—at another he dismayed me with his fearful menaces! And, Oh, my lord! I have for weeks past been the unhappiest creature in the world, after having for three years been the happiest! But now, if there be aught I can do to atone for the past—Oh, I will risk not for the exposure of my lineage, nor will I take heed of the calumnies which the villain Mompesson may utter against me! There is no sacrifice I will not make on behalf of the beloved mistress whom I feel as if I had been most wickedly and infamously betraying!”

“Excite not yourself unnecessarily,” said the Earl of Bassentyne. “If you are contrite, you may doubtless find opportunities of proving your penitence; and if you have any traitorous designs, rest assured that we shall discover them.”

“Oh, my lord!” she exclaimed, “I am contented to be judged by my works.”

“Be it so,” said the Earl. “And now lose no time, Maude, in giving the information which you have brought or delivering the message with which you may be charged. The Queen is a prisoner, you say?”

“Yes, my lord; and the sentinels have received strictest orders in reference to the safe custody of her Grace. The Lord Chamberlain has been appointed governor of the castle—”

“By all the saints!” ejaculated the Earl, “these are stringent measures! And of what is her Majesty accused?”

“I will now show you, my lord,” responded the damsel, “whether I am deemed trustworthy by Marion Galbraith. She has told me everything, that I might be enabled to make intelligible communications unto your lordship. Know, then, that the Queen is accused of receiving stealthy visits from your lordship; and the letter and the ring belonging to a past date, will doubtless be brought forward to prove that there was once a love-suit between your lordship and that august lady—so that the inference may be drawn to the effect that the tender correspondence of other times has been renewed within these few weeks.”

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated the Earl; "I can understand that such will be the diabolic game which King David may seek to play in order to rid himself of his Queen! But Marion herself was present at the interview which took place betwixt the Queen and me!"

"Mistress Marion has bidden me tell your lordship everything with frankness and with candour," continued Maude. "You will not therefore deem her conduct bold and audacious in reference to yourself, but rather ascribe it to the sincere devotedness which she cherishes towards her beloved mistress, when I inform your lordship that throwing herself at the King's feet, she vowed that the Queen was innocent and that it was on her own account solely you had penetrated into the castle!"

"Noble girl!—yes, noble-hearted Marion!" exclaimed Roland, thus enthusiastically apostrophizing the image of Lady Galbraith's daughter. "And I will repeat the same tale!—yes, I will affirm that it was to pay my honourable suit to Marion Galbraith that I entered the castle!—and I will prove it by making her Countess of Bassentyne!"

"Alas, my lord," said the damsel, "I fear that this turn will not now serve the Queen's interests; for there has been a terrible scene betwixt Lady Galbraith and her daughter,—a violent altercation; and Lady Galbraith, doubtless saying in her rage more than she intended, let drop the fact that she had listened at the door of the Queen's apartment when your lordship was there——"

"Ah!" ejaculated the Earl; "every moment does the aspect of affairs become darker and darker! For if Lady Galbraith be the King's witness, she is unprincipled enough to speak whatsoever he may choose to put into her mouth!"

"Yes," interjected Maude; "and this is what Marion now dreads; for it seems to the young lady as if a mask had suddenly fallen from her mother's countenance and as if she beheld her under an aspect which she had never worn before!"

"And thus," said Conrad Rossel, now interposing after having been for some time a silent listener to the discourse, "if the evidence of the mother be pitted against that of the daughter, it will all depend upon the tribunal which shall take cognizance of the case, how the issue may be."

"It would seem as if the nature and composition of this tribunal is already decided upon," said Maude.

"What! so quickly?" exclaimed the Earl of Bassentyne, with indignation and surprise.

"Yes, my lord. For scarcely had the King made a prisoner of the Queen, and ordered Marion Galbraith into close custody under her mother's eye, when messengers were despatched in all possible haste, with instructions to ride day and night until their respective destinations were reached. One was to the holy Abbot of St. Mary's sacred pile at Dryburgh—another was to the equally venerable Abbot of the Priory of St. John at Dalkeith—and the third was to the prelate of St. Monance."

"All these dignitaries of the Church," ejaculated the Earl of Bassentyne, "are the servile and devoted creatures of the King! Is it by such a packed tribunal as this that the Queen is to be judged?"

"And mark you not, my lord," interjected Sir Conrad Rossel, "the significance of such a tribunal? It is a synod of prelates competent to pronounce a divorce! And now more than ever does Queen Margaret stand in need of friendly succour!"

"And that should be most prompt!" cried the Earl; "for David's motive in thus hastily despatching his messenger to fetch those prelates, is sufficiently apparent. He is striking blow after blow in

rapid succession!—he seeks to allow no time for the news to travel to the Queen's brother, the chivalrous young Lord of Liddesdale—nor to her old and tried friend the Earl of Caithness—much less to your princely master, Sir Conrad, across the sea and then across half the Continent of Europe! Oh, something must be done—and that speedily! Does Marion Galbraith suggest aught?" demanded the Earl, turning towards Maude.

"If Mistress Marion's fears may be taken as suggestions, my lord, they can be speedily thus interpreted. In the first place, that his Majesty King David will endeavour to seize upon your lordship's person and plunge you into a dungeon, so that your evidence may not be forthcoming, is probable enough."

"And I have before experienced such pleasant treatment at his Grace's instigation!" interjected Roland bitterly.

"But it is equally probable, on the other hand," continued Maude, "that the King may leave your lordship at liberty, in order that you may present yourself, if you think fit, before the synod and give your evidence; so that by this apparently candid, open, and frank behaviour on the Monarch's part, there may be a more honourable gloss thrown over the entire transaction."

"And I for one pronounce," cried Sir Conrad Rossel, "that this will be King David's policy! He is cunning as the fox and wily as the serpent! In good sooth, if David's object were to arrest your lordship, he would have despatched his men-at-arms for that purpose at the same time that he sent off messengers to the servile prelates who are to compose this villanously packed tribunal."

"And no such mandate for your lordship's arrest was given," said Maude; "for in respect to this particular information which I have given you, touching and concerning the projected synod, I am indebted to one who was present when the emissaries were sent off,—a certain Arthur Curtoys," she added, with a slight blush suffusing her countenance.

"In any case, I will be upon my guard," said the Earl of Bassentyne. "Proceed, damsel. You have not yet touched upon those fears on Mistress Marion's part which you think may be taken as suggestive of a special course for us to pursue?"

"I now approach that point, my lord," answered Maude. "Tis clear that the synod is to assemble quickly, in order that the trial may take place, and that judgment may speedily follow. 'Tis also clear that Lady Galbraith will give her evidence against the Queen; and heaven knows how readily the King may find other witnesses——"

"The villain Mompesson for instance!" interjected Sir Conrad Rossel.

"And inasmuch, my lord," continued the damsel, "as you yourself will stand, so to speak, in the light of an accused person, the only testimony which might possibly avail the royal Margaret and your lordship's self, would be that of Mistress Marion Galbraith, who was present at the interview which took place between you. And now I come to the young lady's fears. She dreads lest this prisonage to which she is consigned under her mother's eye, should only be a pretext for keeping her altogether away from the tribunal;—and it may even be that the hours of her sojourn at Castle Urquhart are already numbered; and who can tell but that during the coming night she may be hurried off to some other stronghold, where in captivity she may be retained until all is over and the doom of the divorced Queen shall be sealed?"

"That this will be David's policy," ejaculated Roland of Bassentyne, "is as clear as if it were

written in a book for clerly eyes to read!—it is as visible as the pebbly bed of a streamlet seen through its pellucid water!"

"Let us take it for granted that it will be so," observed Conrad Rossel; "and let us act accordingly. Mistress Marion's fears therefore suggest the course which we ought to pursue. And this course," he added, emphatically, "is for us to effect the liberation of Mistress Marion, or perish in the attempt!"

"Be it so!" rejoined Roland. "We shall either succeed in procuring on our side, and in being enabled to produce, the witness whose testimony is of vital importance to Queen Margaret's fame, name, and welfare; or else we shall perish in the performance of our duty as Christians and as good knights! Think you, damsel, that if the means be found, Mistress Marion Galbraith will consent to flee from yon castle?"

"I know, my lord," replied the handmaiden firmly, "and from the speech which I just now had with Mistress Marion I can affirm, that she will do everything that may be needful for the furtherance of the interests of our beloved royal mistress."

"And yet it is no light thing," said the Earl of Bassentyne, now speaking in a very grave and serious tone, "for a young lady to risk her fair fame and good repute in fleeing with men who are not of her kindred. Say you therefore—" he hesitated for a moment—he reflected—and then he went on to observe in a firm and resolute tone, "Say you therefore, Maude, unto Mistress Marion Galbraith, that the Earl of Bassentyne asks her to flee from Urquhart Castle—to place herself under his protection, that with the least possible delay he may conduct her to the altar and place upon her brow the coronet of a countess! Say likewise that this is all the more needful because the tale can then go forth to the world that there has existed a love between us ever since we met upwards of three years ago in the Castle of the Bass Rock;—and this will go far towards disproving the calumnious allegation that I dared cherish an unholy passion for the Queen. And you may add," continued the chivalrous Earl, "that it is not altogether as a matter of expediency that I thus offer my hand unto Marion Galbraith: but you may assure her—and truthfully so—that I am deeply, deeply touched by her noble conduct towards her persecuted mistress, and that I entertain the profound conviction that so loyal a subject and so sincere a friend cannot fail to make a good and loving wife."

Sir Conrad Rossel gazed with admiration upon the Earl of Bassentyne as he thus spoke; and Maude's beautiful blue eyes swam in tears as she regarded him with a kindred sentiment.

"I will faithfully bear your messages, my lord," she said; "and it will be a pleasure as well as a duty to repeat such noble words as those which have just issued from your lips."

"Thus far, thus good," said Conrad Rossel. "And now for the most important point which we have for our consideration. We take it for granted that Mistress Marion Galbraith will consent to flee. But the means of effecting her escape from yon castle? Who shall guide or tutor us in this respect? Have you, damsel, aught to suggest upon the point?"

Maude reflected; and there as a deep silence for upwards of a minute. This pause was broken by the Teutonic warrior, who said, "But how happens it, damsel, that you ere now obtained speech in privacy with Mistress Marion Galbraith, considering that you have given us the assurance that she is under watch and ward on her mother's part?"

"That explanation is quickly afforded," replied

Maude. "A sentinel is placed at the beginning of the passage communicating with Lady Galbraith's suite of apartments, wherein Marion is now imprisoned. But that sentinel—he is the same Arthur Curtoys to whom I just now alluded—and—and—he will refuse no boon that I may demand of him."

"Enough, damsel!" said the Earl of Bassentyne, who by the tell-tale blush on the young woman's cheeks had no difficulty in reading the secret of her love.

"Yet would I add another word or two," continued Maude. "The father of Arthur Curtoys is devoted to the Queen's interests.—In short, my lord, I have it in my power to do with him as well as with his son. Otherwise should I have now been unable to come forth from the castle without an express permission from the Lord Chamberlain, the newly appointed governor. But forasmuch as the elder Master Curtoys is at present keeping a two hours' watch and ward at the outer gate, he suffered me to glide past him when I had whispered a few words in his ear."

"Now, maiden," said Sir Conrad Rossel, in a very different tone from that which he had hitherto used to the royal firewoman, "I have well studied your speech, and watched your looks while you were speaking. In the former there has been no inconsistency: in the latter naught to create suspicion. I am slow to believe in the good faith of others; but when once I do believe, it is with a friendly sincerity. Pardon me, therefore, if there may have been aught in my share of the preceding colloquy which has proved hurtful to your feelings."

"Say not another word, Sir Knight," responded Maude, with tears in her eyes. "Nothing can be more kindly than the language wherein you have this moment been addressing me! And now, as to the means of effecting the escape of Mistress Marion Galbraith, an idea has struck me!—methinks I can suggest something!"

Maude detailed her plan, in that same lucid, frank, and intelligent manner which had characterized all those portions of her discourse where her feelings were not very painfully excited. The project was quickly discussed; certain little emendations were suggested by the Earl and the Knight; and it was finally agreed upon. Maude then hastened away, in order to retrace her steps to the castle.

"And now," said the Earl of Bassentyne, "ought we not, with the least possible delay, to despatch trusty messengers to the Earl of Caithness and to Fleming the Lord of Liddesdale, that they may learn in how dire a strait the Queen is placed?"

"Mount your horse, my lord, and come with me," answered Rossel. "My own steed is stabled in the security of a still more impervious cavern at no great distance. There is a ravine at the back of the glen, where you may remain concealed until nightfall—while I ride on to a village some half-dozen miles hence, where I may lay my hand upon a couple of trusty messengers who shall speed day and night to Ruslin Castle, and thence to Hermitage."

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE RAVINE.—THE DWARF.

THE Earl of Bassentyne mounted his horse; and Sir Conrad Rossel led the way towards that ravine which lay behind the heights overlooking the glen. During their progress they held still further discussion upon the plan which was to be attempted

during the coming night; and then, after a brief pause, the Teutonic warrior said, "Touching and concerning those dignitaries of the Church, my lord, to whom summonses have been sent off that they may form a synod for the trial of Queen Margaret,—you spoke emphatically and decisively of their servile characters?"

"Yes," responded the Earl. "I spoke of them in the terms which they deserve. The Church receives no credit from such dignitaries as those; for not merely do they wink at the vices and profligacies of personages occupying a high estate, but their own characters would scarcely endure a too close inspection on similar points."

"Then ill would it fare with the Queen," said Conrad Rossel, "if the matter were so left to such a synod that it would have naught to do but pronounce sentence without any defence or testimony being offered on the side of the accused."

"Heaven help those who might be thrown upon the tender mercies of such a synod," said the Earl of Bassentyne, "if the King were in the background prompting the actions of his sycophantic creatures! The Abbot of St. Mary's Monastery at Dryburgh is known to be so devoted a partisan of his Majesty that if it suited David to insist that he should be canonized as a saint even while yet alive, that prelate would unhesitatingly enter upon the solemn ceremony. As for the Abbot of the Priory of St. John at Dalkeith, he is selfish and worldly-minded; and so long as the interests and privileges of his establishment are enhanced and aggrandized, he will be prepared to serve the King blindfold."

"And the third prelate of whom your lordship just now spoke," said Conrad Rossel,—"the name has escaped me—"

"The mitred Abbot of St. Monance," rejoined the Earl of Bassentyne.

"St. Monance?" said the Teutonic warrior, slowly re-eating the name. "Methinks I have heard of it before—and yet my idea of its topography is somewhat dim and misty."

"I will recall your recollections on the subject," said the Earl; "and I may perhaps add a few details which were hitherto unknown to you. A long time ago—I know not how many years—a pious hermit occupied a cavern in a rock jutting out into the Firth of Forth from the shore of Fifeshire. This religious votary became canonized at his death by the name of St. Monan; and a small chapel was built close by the cave which had constituted his hermitage. The spot acquired a most holy repute, verging indeed towards the supernatural; for it was declared that miracles were wrought within that chapel, and that persons who were afflicted with sore diseases experienced miraculous cures after having knelt in prayer at the shrine of the saint. Years and years passed away, and the humble chapel became the object of much veneration and curiosity in the neighbourhood; but at length an accident was destined to take place the result of which proved most important for the fane. After the fatal battle of Nevill's Cross, a number of fugitive Scots arrived sorely suffering with wounds, at St. Monance. There they were most hospitably treated—and doubtless they must have been most skillfully ministered unto by the monks who were resident there, for their wounds were speedily healed, and they went away gladdened to their homes. Rumour made a miracle of this; and when King David returned from his captivity of eleven years in England, it was represented to him that he ought to perform some deed which should increase the renown and importance already obtained by the Chapelry of St. Monance. He accordingly made a pilgrimage to the shrine, and then gave orders that the humble chapel should

be displaced by a stately fane. The edifice was erected accordingly; and the abbey was bestowed upon one of the monarch's most devoted creatures. I myself have visited St. Monance; and considering the short time occupied in its structure—barely three years, if my memory serve me aright—it presents a remarkable specimen of the skill of our Scottish masons in their craft. And it is now the mitred prelate of that monastic institution who will doubtless take the leading part in the synod appointed to judge the unfortunate Margaret."

By the time the Earl of Bassentyne had finished speaking, considerable way had been made into the depths of the ravine; and the cave was reached where Conrad Rossel had left his horse. A small leathern portmanteau, strapped on to the back of the Teutonic warrior's saddle, yielded refreshments; and when these were partaken of, Sir Conrad mounted his steed and rode off in the direction of the village whence he purposed to despatch messengers to the Earl of Caithness and the young Lord of Liddesdale.

When left by himself, Roland of Bassentyne reflected seriously upon everything connected with Queen Margaret,—the *past*, in which he himself had been so intimately associated—the *present*, with which he was likewise so closely connected! And then he thought of the message which he had sent to Marion Galbraith, and the offer he had made her of his hand. He did not love her in the literal acceptance of the term: his heart had cherished a lingering affection for Margaret; and though this had mellowed down with the lapse of time, and had also received a very severe shock by the perusal of the letter which had that day fallen into his hands, still the Earl was not enabled so speedily to transfer the allegiance of his first love to a second object. Nevertheless, he admired and respected Marion Galbraith: he entertained a deep sense of gratitude towards her for her generous behaviour to him at the Castle of the Bass Rock; and as he thus continued to contemplate her image, he could not possibly remain insensible to the fact that she was of an exceeding loveliness. Under all these circumstances—even apart from the reasons of policy which had prompted him to send a matrimonial overture to Marion Galbraith—there was nothing very afflictive nor shocking for the Earl of Bassentyne in the idea of shortly conducting such a bride to the altar.

For upwards of an hour after Sir Conrad Rossel's departure, did Roland remain in the cavern giving way to his reflections. But at length he grew wearied of the solitude and monotony of the place; and going forth to the entrance, he looked up and down the ravine. No human being was in view; and Roland issued completely from the shade of the cavern's mouth, that he might survey the surrounding scenery, so wild and savage, and contrasting so strongly in its horrid aspect with the pleasing beauty of the glen on the other side of the heights. Farther and farther proceeded the Earl; and presently he was passing the outskirts of a grove so thickly interlaced with furze, creeping plants, and brambles, that it seemed absolutely impervious to the foot of man, and impenetrable even to the hunted deer, should it seek to plunge into that brake.

The nobleman was pursuing his way, when all of a sudden he was startled by a loud hissing sound; and on glancing down in the direction whence it came, he beheld a snake of considerable size preparing to spring at him. Roland was clad in armour; but he had left his gauntlets in the cave—and the reptile might possibly fix upon one of his naked hands. This idea struck Roland in a mo-

ment; and hastily stepping back, he drew his sword and made a blow at the reptile. Being stricken, but not killed, the snake disappeared in the thicket, while the Earl made another rapid cut amongst the brambles at his retreating enemy. By this action he suddenly found that he had laid open a gap in the entrance of the grove: he caught another glimpse of the snake—he plunged into the thicket—and his steel-clad foot trampled the reptile to death.

Roland now discovered that he was in a sort of pathway leading deeper into the grove; and he thought that he would follow up a route which accident had so strangely revealed to him. He continued his way without any difficulty; for there was a complete and unmistakable path through the grove,—no interlacing boughs, brambles, bines, or thickets impeding his way, though they formed a wall as it were on either side of him.

"Were it not for the adventure with the slimy reptile," he said to himself, "I never should have thought of penetrating into this thicket: I should have passed by on the outskirts. Who could have dreamt that there should be a pathway concealed within? Yes!—and it cannot have been very long either since this path was last trodden, so completely separated are the boughs and the creeping plants! There is some mystery here! Perhaps danger too? But pshaw!"—cried the gallant young nobleman, placing his hand upon the hilt of the sword, which he had returned to its sheath after his conflict with the reptile.

He now found himself at the foot of the chain of heights which separated the ravine from the glen; and the entrance of a cavern was before him. So dense was there the mass of verdure that the opening of the cave was quite dark; and when he had entered it only a few yards he was completely enveloped in obscurity.

"It were useless to rush thus blindly upon unknown dangers," he murmured to himself; "and it were madness to risk the chance of being precipitated headlong into some chasm. And yet here is evidently a mystery which I would fain penetrate! What shall I do? Ah! I have it!"

Roland speedily retraced his way to the cavern where he had left his steed; for he remembered that Conrad Rossel had not taken his valise with him, and that it contained materials for procuring a light. In a quarter of an hour those materials were procured, and the Earl of Bassentyne was again making his way through the thicket. Thus the entrance of the cave in the heights was once more reached; a small portable lamp was lighted; and with this in his left hand, and his drawn sword in his right, Roland pursued his way. For more than a hundred yards, as nearly as he could guess, did the Earl thus proceed along an irregular passage hollowed in the bowels of the hilly range, until at length his way was abruptly barred by what appeared to be a wall of rock.

"There must be an issue somewhere," he thought to himself. "That pathway through the grove and this passage into the bosom of the mountain could not have been meant to lead to naught!"

While this thought was passing through his mind, Roland beheld certain indications in the seeming wall of rock which induced him to conjecture the contrivance of a doorway here. He examined the whole details more closely—he felt the barrier of rock with his right hand he pushed it—there was a movement—harder still did he push—and behold! the seeming wall opened in the shape of folding doors before him!

The Earl now found himself in another cavern, where he beheld the remnants of a vast variety of

warlike materials scattered about. He also perceived human bones lying here and there. In what place was he? Was it a sepulchre? was it a prison? or was it a subterranean where fugitive warriors or pursued banditti had sought refuge and where they had miserably perished? But Ah! there were remnants of massive engines of warfare belonging to a by-gone age. Curiosity naturally led the Earl to bestow a closer inspection upon these objects; and he presently noticed that some parts of the ponderous mechanism had evidently been lately used. After a little trouble the Earl was enabled to satisfy himself that a wheel, with a portion of its axle, had been so contrived as to fit on to two up-rights; and these up-rights had at no very distant period been driven into the ground, for pieces and patches of earth which had adhered had dried upon the lower portions of those stakes. What could this mean? Roland looked around him; and he beheld some dark bundle in a species of niche. He drew it forth, and found that it consisted of a suit of male garments—of an ordinary width, but excessively short, and of a dark colour.

"By all the saints!" ejaculated the Earl to himself, "one would think these garments had actually been made for that villainous dwarf whose image keeps rising uppermost in my thoughts! Yes—'tis no silly fancy on my part! The very fashion—the very cut of the raiment that would suit him! And it is comparatively new also; while all these objects that are around me are crumbling and mouldering with age. 'Tis strange! most strange! Ah! and by St. Andrew! here is a piece of pine-wood which has not very long ago served as a torch! Yes!—this is sufficiently clear," added the Earl, after having more closely examined the carbonised portion of the end of the piece of fire-wood.

Again looking around him, the Earl of Bassentyne perceived an ascent of steps cut out of the hard soil, and broken in many places. A farther examination showed him that the top was covered by a square stone. He pushed upward with all his might; but the stone seemed to be immovable. He struck it with the hilt of his sword: and he judged from the dull dead sound which the concussion sent forth, that something else lay above the stone,—either earth, or else a layer of mortar and more masonry. But Roland was determined to push his investigations as far as possible, for he was surrounded by mysteries which he could not help thinking had more or less connexion with the dwarf Mompesson. He thrust up the blade of his sword against the side of the stone where it fitted into its setting; and so trifling was the resistance that in a few moments it had penetrated to its hilt in the superincumbent soil. Then the Earl picked up a fragment of one of the rusted weapons in the cavern: and with this he worked away until he removed a sufficient quantity of the earth to be enabled to thrust his arm completely through the aperture he had just made. A few minutes more saw his labour so much advanced that the stone was removed from its setting; and the Earl ascended into the uppermost cave.

He looked forth and he saw that it was Glen Urquhart which now lay before him! He had penetrated completely through the range of heights which separated that glen from the ravine! He saw no one; but he did not choose to advance very far from the mouth of the cave, for fear lest any person belonging to the castle should abruptly appear. Besides, the Earl knew that it was now time for him to retrace his way to the spot where he had left his steed; for he said to himself, "Sir Conrad will be soon returning; and if he should find me not in the ravine, he will naturally experience a thousand

apprehensions. As for this series of caves, it seems that I have got to the end of their mysteries, but without understanding them!"

The Earl of Bassentyne descended the narrow staircase, and reached the cavern below. He tarried for a few minutes longer to take another survey of that place; and he now discerned some coils of rope, with massive pieces of iron attached to them, as if they had served as weights for some purpose or another. The Earl naturally associated them with the pieces of mechanism which had already attracted his attention so closely; for he said to himself, "This cordage is quite new, and belongs to a date far more recent than that which concerns the crumbling and rusting materials scattered around me!"

Roland then pursued his way along the irregular passage, the granite folding-doors closing behind him; and in a few minutes he reached the thicket. There he extinguished his lantern; and he made the best of his way towards the cave where he had left his horse. Scarcely had he reached it, when he discerned Sir Conrad Rossel advancing at a smart gallop along the bed of the ravine.

"This done, my lord!" ejaculated the Teutonic warrior as he leapt down from his saddle. "I have found trusty messengers—and what is more, I have seen them depart! But I have much to tell you, my lord!"

"And I also have much to tell you, Sir Knight," responded the Earl.

"It is about Mompesson!" interjected Conrad.

"Ah! and I shall be surprised," pursued Roland of Bassentyne, "if the intelligence I have to impart do not also refer in some sense to that imp of wickedness!"

"I have heard many strange things concerning him——"

"Ah! is it so?" said the nobleman. "Then do you speak first, Sir Conrad!"

"At the village which I have just visited," resumed the Teutonic warrior, "and where I am well known—under an assumed name, however, be it well understood—for I have made it one of my sojourning places while keeping watch upon Urquhart Castle—at that village, I say, I have heard some strange things about Mompesson. Why, the villain came into these parts as a conjuror—a dealer in necromancy—practising with a divining-rod—or fulfilling some such imposture-part!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Earl. "I learnt nothing of all this! It is a wonder that Maude told us not."

"Doubtless she must have thought that we were well acquainted with his antics," remarked the Teutonic warrior, "from the style and fashion in which we both spoke to her of the villain. Besides, our colloquy with her was so rapid and hurried—it jumped from topic to topic——"

"True, true, Sir Conrad!" cried the Earl. "As for myself, the moment after my stealthy visit to Urquhart Castle, I returned with all possible despatch to mine own home; and then, at the expiration of several days, I journeyed hitherward again; so that in the interval I had really no opportunity of learning anything in respect to Mompesson. Moreover, I suspected not his integrity, and could see no reason for instituting any special investigation."

"And I, as I have already told you," resumed Sir Conrad Rossel, "only returned into this district yesterday after an absence of nearly three months; and thus I was also ignorant until within the last two hours of the mode by which the deformed impostor worked his way into the confidence and favour of the Queen and insinuated himself into Castle Urquhart."

"And now then, Sir Knight, what intelligence is it that you have gleaned at yonder village?" asked Roland, who was all anxiety to receive the information; for his mind was full of the incidents of the caverns from which he had just returned, and with the mysteries of which he so naturally associated Mompesson.

"It seems," pursued Rossel, "that about three months ago—it must have been just about the very time that I took my departure hence to go upon the Continent and visit Prince de Salza, as I have already explained to your lordship—the dwarf made his appearance in this neighbourhood."

The Teutonic warrior then proceeded to relate how the Queen and her suite, when riding through the glen, encountered the hideous dwarf, who practised some arts with a divining-rod, and then consented to be shut up in a cavern until such time as he should have found the treasure to which the osier wand pointed.

"A cavern?" cried the Earl, beginning to think that Sir Conrad's explanations were already dovetailing in with the circumstances which had come to his own knowledge. "And he consented to be walled in? Why, the uppermost cave that I ere now visited, had blocks of masonry strown about in front!"

"What cave did you visit, my lord?" asked Rossel, in bewildered surprise. "Your words are Hebrew to me!"

"True, true! I had forgotten!" said the nobleman. "But listen, and I will soon make my speech intelligible."

He then proceeded to relate everything which had occurred; and the Teutonic warrior listened with the most eager interest.

"By St. John, this is most strange!" exclaimed the latter. "But hear the rest that I have to tell. It appears that after his mummeries with the divining-rod, the fellow remained in the cavern for some days: he then produced a treasure; and all the superstitious sympathy of the Queen and Court suite was enlisted on his behalf."

"After all, then," cried the Earl, "that suit of diminutive garments must have belonged to the wretch!"

"And as you found them in the lower cavern," said Conrad Rossel, "it is a proof that all the mysterious outlets from the upper cave were known unto him."

"Yes—and no wonder that I thought the pathway through the thicket had been lately trodden!" interjected the Earl. "And then there is the mystery of that mechanism—the cordage with the weights appended—the wheel—the uprights——"

"Ah! speaking of the cordage," said Conrad, "reminds me of something I had omitted to tell your lordship. The dwarf purchased a coil of cord at the village whither I have just been."

"There is some deep, deep mystery connected with all this!" said the Earl, musing, but with bewilderment expressed upon his countenance.

"A mystery which for the present is unfathomable!" added Rossel. "Who knows if even the distorted imp did veritably remain all those days in the upper cavern?—why was he so careful to convince the royal suite that there was no outlet? As for the cord and the machinery, how could these have served his jugglery?"

"But as for the treasure which he pretended to find," said the Earl, "may it not have been originally stumbled over by him in the lower cave where I observed the rusted remnants of armour and the mouldering relics of mortality! What more likely than that there should be gold hidden in such a secret place?—perhaps a robbers' stronghold? per-

happened the last retreat of some chieftain pursued by a feudal enemy?"

"It is a mystery which defies conjecture," rejoined Roscel.

It were useless to record any more of the conversation which took place between the Earl and the Knight in the ravine: we will therefore pass on to the next incident in our narrative.

Hours had elapsed: it was now verging towards midnight; and the moon rode high in the heavens. There were a few dark clouds lazily floating over the empyrean canopy; but it was only at distant intervals that they obscured the silver crescent—and it was almost too light for the expedition which the warriors had in hand. Nevertheless they were determined to risk it, provided that circumstances within the castle itself should be progressing favourably and propitiously, according to their understanding with Maude. They saddled their horses; and as Sir Conrad Roscel slung a long coil of rope to his saddle-bow, he casually observed, "It was at the very cordwainer's where I purchased this stout twisted yarn, that I chanced to learn how the dwarf had made his own purchase of rope there. The wainer has a daughter occupying some menial position in the Castle; and it was from her that he heard all the particulars of the adventures in the glen between the royal suite and the distorted imp, as the man just now told them to me and as I have already narrated them to your lordship."

The Earl and the Knight continued their way; and in a few minutes they reached a point where the hills separating the ravine from the glen, ceased, and where Castle Urquhart broke upon their view in the silver moonlight. An ejaculation burst from the lips of both; and the Earl exclaimed, "Behold the lamp! It is burning in the solitary window of yon flanking tower!"

"'Tis good! and all goes on well!" cried Sir Conrad. "Maude's signal encourages us onward. If the girl be faithful, we may dare hope for success, my lord!"

"She will be faithful, Sir Conrad," returned Roland, with the emphasis of one who was speaking from the depth of his settled conviction.

We must remind the reader that Castle Urquhart stood upon a high rock on the shore of Loch Ness, and that there was but one entrance into the fortress by a somewhat steep ascending path up a fissure, or rather indentation, in the south-western side of the rock itself. We have likewise said in a preceding chapter that the castellated edifice was considered to be as nearly inaccessible as possible,—or at all events accessible only to the intrepid individual who might succeed in clambering up the escarped walls of rock. Now, it assuredly was not by means of the well-guarded pathway which indented the south-western side of the rock that our two adventurers thought of effecting their purpose. No! it was on precisely the opposite side—namely, on the north-eastern one—that the enterprise was to be conducted.

At a little distance from the castle—and in a convenient spot for concealing them—the Earl and the Knight dismounted from their horses. They then continued their way on foot; and fortunately at this time the dark clouds obscured the moon. It was thus that without even the possibility of observation they reached the foot of the huge rock on which the castle stood. The clouds rolled slowly away—the silver crescent-moon came forth again—and now the warriors were rejoiced at its presence, which was indeed almost indispensable at this particular juncture to aid them in their proceedings.

"Hark! did you hear anything?" inquired Sir Conrad.

"Methought I heard something like a stone drop," answered the Earl, "just as yon clouds began to clear off. But stay! let us search for the thread. Go with an outstretched arm in that direction, while I proceed in this! If the moon serve us but a few moments longer, we shall see the thread perchance!"

The projections of the rugged face of the rock overhung the warriors in such a manner that they could not see the walls above them; but they likewise had the advantage of being screened by the same circumstance from the view of any sentinels who might be posted at the point where their own friendly accomplices inside the fortress would have no power to act on their behalf. Two or three minutes elapsed; and then Conrad Roscel suddenly whispered, "My lord! my lord! it is here! I have caught the thread! And now the moon may become obscured again forthwith if it will!"

The Earl of Bassentyne hastily turned round, and in a few moments was on the spot where his companion stood. The latter was already actively engaged in fastening one end of the cord which he had brought with him, to a length of packthread which hung down over the rugged face of the rock. He gave a slight jerk at the thread, which was almost immediately drawn upward, carrying the rope with it.

"All goes well!" whispered the Earl of Bassentyne: "we shall succeed, Sir Conrad! we shall succeed!"

"I hope so, my lord," responded the Teutonic warrior, who was more phlegmatic and therefore less sanguine than his comrade.

About a minute elapsed; and then the rope having been drawn up nearly to its full length from the base of the rock, vibrated perceptibly twice or thrice.

"I will ascend first!" ejaculated Sir Roland.

"No!—I, my lord!" answered the Teutonic warrior. "If there be treachery—"

"Then let me become its victim!" interrupted the Earl; "for it is rather my case than your's."

"Nay, my lord," rejoined Conrad quickly; "I am pledged to Prince de Salza to devote my life unto the service of Queen Margaret!"

Then up the rope sprang Sir Conrad Roscel, thus putting an end to this generous rivalry. The Earl of Bassentyne wished him "God speed;" and in a few moments the Teutonic warrior disappeared from the view of his friend,—the rugged projections of the rock thus interposing between him who was climbing up above and him who was left below. Sir Conrad gained a sort of ledge, which was more than two-thirds up the escarped ascent, but which nevertheless was still some little distance from the rampart overhead which it was ultimately necessary to reach. Just as he gained this ledge, he could scarcely suppress an ejaculation of horror when he felt that the particular part of the rope which his hand now clutched, was severed almost in twain! For an instant an idea of treachery flashed through his brain; but as he flung a lightning glance around, he beheld no one who could have cut the rope in that particular spot; and he therefore mentally ejaculated, "It must have frayed against a sharp angle of the jutting rock!"

But fearless of death, as a general rule, though the warrior were, he could not help shuddering when he thought that if the rope had only given way entirely he must have been dashed to pieces;—and how it was that it had not suddenly severed completely, seemed to be a perfect miracle, considering how great was his weight with his armour on.

However, he was safe upon the ledge, and with-



out losing another moment, he twisted the rope firmly around his wrist—while the Earl of Bassentyne below, obeying the signal conveyed by the oscillation of the cord, began the ascent in his turn. Little dreamt the intrepid nobleman of the terrific danger which his friend Sir Conrad had just escaped! Upward he went; and now he reached the projecting crag. This was the most difficult part of the ascent for one so heavily encumbered with his armour; but the Earl showed liveness and agility—and soon his plumed head appeared above the projecting mass, to the view of Sir Conrad Rossel.

At that very moment the Teutonic warrior felt so sudden a jerking of the rope that it required all his strength to sustain his friend's weight. And as for the Earl himself, he was within an hair's breadth of letting go his hold—he only recovered it by a convulsive clutching of the rope again; for at the very instant when his eyes rose above the projecting crag, he had caught sight of an object that had almost a basilisk effect upon him! But the danger was past; and in less than a quarter of a minute he stood safely upon the ledge, by Sir Conrad's side.

"What meant that sudden jerk, my lord?" asked Rossel quickly.

"Why held you the rope?" demanded the Earl.

"'Twas nearly severed! It must have been an accident—it could scarcely be through treachery—"

"Yes—treachery!" ejaculated Roland. "And here it is!"

Thereupon, to the infinite astonishment and no small curiosity of Sir Conrad Rossel, the Earl of Bassentyne strode forward about half-a-dozen paces along the ledge; and forth from a species of little cave or recess, shaded by overhanging foliage, he dragged forth the dwarf Mompesson.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

MOMPESSEON'S FATE.

At the very instant that the Earl of Bassentyne laid hold upon the dwarf, he whispered in a low but stern voice, "Raise no alarm, or your moments are numbered!"

Mompesson was suddenly seized with a paralyzing terror which placed a seal upon his lips; and it was an affrighted as well as a piteous glance which he bent upon Roland of Bassentyne. Then did his eyes fling a look of inquiry upon Conrad Rossel, as if wondering who he might be. The Earl and the Knight instantaneously remarked that he was completely appalled in all respects with the exception of his feet, which were naked; and thus the same idea struck them both simultaneously.

"He has been stealthily creeping somewhere!" said Conrad, pointing down to those feet that were homeless and shoeless. "But by St. Jude! we will now extract all his secrets from him!"

"Whether our enterprise be thoroughly betrayed and lost," said Roland of Bassentyne, "or whether, we may yet pursue it—and whether a delay of a few minutes more or less may make any difference whatsoever—it is absolutely necessary that we should question this villain. Now look you, Master Dwarf! here you stand upon the edge of a precipice—and if you dare to raise your voice above a whisper in responding to our queries—or if in any other respect we behold an endeavour to raise an alarm—down you shall go!"

"Spare me, my lord! spare me!" murmured the dwarf; "and I will reveal everything!"

"But beware how you answer falsely, or how

you trifle with us!" continued the Earl. "We shall presently have opportunities of judging of your veracity! First of all, then, tell us how you came in that lurking-hole?"

"If I tell you truly, my lord," asked the dwarf, in a tone of earnest entreaty, "will my life be spared?"

"Dare not attempt to make terms with us, miscreant abortion that thou art!" interposed Conrad Rossel. "Speak—and let us judge for ourselves to what extent we may venture to show mercy in the present case: for there are other matters whereupon we have to question thee. At once answer therefore—how came you in that lurking-hole?"

"The King commanded me to maintain a watchful eye over the castle," responded the dwarf.

"And you saw something to excite your suspicions?" demanded Rossel. "Was it so—eh?"

"Yes:—I saw Maude, the Queen's chief tirewoman, stealing across the courtyard to the rampart which is high above us. I watched—"

"To whom did she speak on that rampart?" asked Sir Conrad. "Come!—quick!—tell us!"

"She spoke to the elder Curtoys, who is mounting guard there," returned the dwarf.

"Ah, well! now we know you are speaking truly," interjected Rossel; "so that you may see there are circumstances and incidents by means of which we can test your veracity. Proceed! You beheld Maude speak to the elder Curtoys?"

"Yes—and then Maude tied a small stone to the end of a packthread, and carefully lowered it from the rampart over this precipice."

"Ah! and how came you homeless and shoeless?" demanded Rossel.

"To speak soothly," responded the dwarf, "it was my purpose to glide stealthily along in the shade of the parapet, and to catch what passed between the elder Curtoys and Maude: but they separated—Curtoys continued to pace heavily to and fro on the rampart—while Maude unwound the coil of packthread—"

"And then, Satan's imp that you are!" interjected Rossel, "you lowered yourself over the parapet, and you clambered down the craggy precipice until you hid yourself in that recess? Is this so?"

"It is, Sir Stranger," answered Mompesson.

"And would you undertake to lead the Earl and me," demanded Rossel, "up the path down which you thus descended?"

"Armed as ye both are," rejoined the dwarf, "ye could not scale that route. Behold it! It was only by swinging myself from bough to bough and from crag to crag—by gliding warily and leaping deftly—"

"Enough!" interjected Rossel, who was convinced of the truth of this statement, by following with his eyes the direction towards which the dwarf was looking. "I see that it were impracticable for armed men to pass that way. Proceed you, therefore, with your explanations. You hid yourself in that recess—eh?"

"Methought," pursued Mompesson, "that I should behold a letter drawn up by means of the packthread."

"Ah!" said the Teutonic warrior: "and thus, you would have glided forth and have possessed yourself of it?"

"But not being altogether sure what the meaning of the proceeding might be," continued Mompesson, "I hid myself there. In a few moments—"

"You beheld a rope drawn up, and not a letter—eh?" asked Rossel.

"Even so," rejoined the dwarf; "and then I

began to surmise that there was some attempt being made to scale the castle."

"And to prevent it," interjected Rossel fiercely, "you doubtless stole forth from your ambush—and you well-nigh severed the cord!"

"Had I been obeying your orders, and if this castle were your own," replied Mompesson, "you would commend my fidelity."

"Wretch!" ejaculated the Teutonic warrior: but instantaneously checking his wrath—or rather, we should say, the ebullition of it, he demanded, "And how came you to cut so badly or so hastily?"

"I caught a glimpse of your head just over the precipice," responded the dwarf, "and I glided back to the little cave. Now, Sir Stranger, I have told you all the truth; and to your generosity I appeal—to your's likewise, my lord!" continued Mompesson, turning towards the Earl of Bassentyne.

"Stop!" ejaculated Sir Conrad Rossel: "it is yet too early to appeal to us for mercy!"

"Confess everything" said the Earl of Bassentyne,—“prove to us that you are willing to make an atonement for whatsoever amount of mischief you have wrought—and this we know to be great—”

"I will! I will, my lord!" ejaculated the dwarf; "and then you will forgive me, and you will suffer me to live!"

"First of all," interposed Sir Conrad Rossel, "let us catechise him in reference to the caverns."

"The caverns?" repeated Mompesson, for an instant thrown off his guard; and as the moonlight streamed on his countenance, an expression of ghastly terror was suddenly revealed.

"Yes—the caverns!" said Conrad Rossel. "Ah! we know more than you think, Master Mompesson! Wretch! down upon your knees, and tell me all the purposes for which you have been so darkly serving the Countess of Morton!"

As he thus spoke, Sir Conrad Rossel literally tore the dwarf away from the firm clutch which the Earl of Bassentyne had hitherto maintained upon him; and pinioning him, as it were, against the face of the rock, the Teutonic warrior fixed his eyes sternly on Mompesson's countenance, as if to read at a glance whether he dared trifle with him. The mention of the name of the Countess of Morton struck a new and sudden terror into the dwarf's soul; for in the confusion of his ideas it had not occurred to him, or else he had ceased to bear in mind, that Maude must evidently have been in communication with the Earl of Bassentyne and his companion; and that therefore she might have told them many things which the dwarf would rather that she had suppressed.

"Yes—the Countess of Morton, I said!" ejaculated Sir Conrad Rossel, with a still fiercer expression of countenance; "and I warn you against trifling with me; for I repeat that I know more than you imagine! You, Mompesson, have for years been in her service—"

"Oh, spare me, whoever you are!" interjected the dwarf. "I have but obeyed the mandates of a mistress whom I love!"

"The caves, Mompesson?—the caves?" exclaimed Sir Conrad: "what have you to tell us of those caverns leading from the ravine to the glen?—what have you to tell us of the mechanism?—the wheel—the weights—and the new cog which you purchased in the neighbouring village?"

Mompesson groaned; and the expression of his countenance became hideously ghastly as the Teutonic warrior's bright black eyes were riveted scrutinizingly upon him.

"Yes—and the sombre-coloured dress which you left behind you in the lower cave?" continued Sir Conrad: "and the mummeries you practised—"

Again Mompesson groaned; and a guilty terror was expressed in every lineament of his hideous countenance.

"Speak, wretch! speak!" exclaimed Sir Conrad. "Confess! The Countess of Morton—"

"She instigated it all!" answered the dwarf. "Spare me, therefore! You can but regard me as her ladyship's serf or bondsman, bound to do her bidding in all things—yes, even to the shedding of blood!"

"Wretch!" ejaculated Conrad Rossel, as a light suddenly flashed across his mind, terrible as the vivid glare of lightning when it bursts upon the vision of the wave-tossed mariner amidst the inky blackness of the night. "Yes! it must be! I see it all! 'Tis no mere suspicion! Ah, villain! bloodstained monster that thou art!"

"Spare me!" moaned Mompesson: "spare me, I beseech you!"—and then, as all his ideas were thrown into horrible confusion, he went on to say, "The Countess prompted it all! She bade me devise some means to journey from hence to Carlisle and from Carlisle back again—three hundred and forty miles!—without suffering a soul to know that I was on such a journey at all—so that every suspicion might be hushed—"

"By St. Jude! it is all too plain!" cried Conrad Rossel. "Yet give me the details!" he added, in a tone that suddenly became deep and sombre, while his looks were of a kindred expression: "give me the details, that there may be no mistake! You were not actually shut up for all those days in the cavern?"

"No, no! It was then that I set out on my journey," answered the terror-stricken dwarf.

"And you assassinated your master? you slew the Earl while he slept?" said Rossel gloomily.

"Heaven forgive me that I did it!" moaned Mompesson: "but it was to make the Countess a widow—"

"A widow? Ah! truly!" interjected Conrad. "A widow?—in order that—"

"She might become the Queen of Scotland! Oh, now you see," continued Mompesson, imploringly, "that I was but an agent—a tool—an instrument—"

"But not the less a murderer!" exclaimed the Teutonic warrior, "while my wretched sister is not the less a murderess!"

"Your sister?" ejaculated the dwarf, now ready to sink with affright at the stern sinister looks that were flaming upon him.

"Yes! my sister, miscreant!—and you have rendered her a murderess! Take thy reward!"

With these words, Sir Conrad Rossel,—a prey to a sudden transport of rage—rendered infuriate and implacable by a paroxysm of feeling utterly beyond control,—swung the dwarf round and hurled him over the edge of the precipice. A cry pealed from the miserable wretch's lips: an ejaculation of horror broke from the Earl of Bassentyne.

"Silence, my lord! He deserved it!" ejaculated Rossel.

Roland was instantaneously smitten with the truth of the declaration just made: but he said nothing, as bending forward, he still kept his eyes riveted upon the edge of the abyss down which the dwarf had just disappeared.

"I repeat, my lord," said the Teutonic warrior, with a sombre sternness of countenance, "that it is a just retribution!—and there shall yet be another, and a darker one!" he mentally added, while an awful gloom settled upon his features.

"Yes—the retribution was just," said Roland "But that cry which pealed forth—"

"Hush!" said Sir Conrad: "if there be an alarm

raised, we shall soon hear the challenge of the sentinel on yonder walls! Hush!—hush!”

But all continued still: and Sir Conrad at length said, “If the cry were heard at all, it was taken for that of some wild bird screaming in its flight. And now, my lord; what think you? How stands our enterprise? Did the dwarf speak truly in the explanations which he gave us ere now? or has Maude proved faithless, and was it a mere idle tale that he told us?”

“Maude has not proved faithless!” answered Roland of Bassentyne. “If treachery had been meant, the dwarf’s hand would not have nervously and tardily sought to sever that rope; but he would have cut it completely at the outset, and you would not have been here to serve as retribution’s instrument towards the miserable wretch!”

“True, true, my lord!” said Sir Conrad. “Again have I been wrong to suspect Maude’s fidelity. Let us therefore pursue the enterprise. Stay, we will make the cord vibrate, as a signal, up to the top where it is fastened.”

The Teutonic warrior accordingly shook the rope which hung down from the rampart high overhead; and to his joy he beheld it shaken in return.

“Now ’tis my first turn again!” he said, as he prepared to commence climbing up the rope.

“’Tis mine, my lord! that I may prove how my fleeting suspicion, so injurious to poor Maude, has completely vanished! And while I ascend,” added Rossel, “do you, my lord, reeve the rope together where the villainous dwarf well-nigh severed it in twain.”

The Teutonic warrior commenced climbing up the rope which dangled from above; and in a few minutes he reached the top of the rock where the parapet stood. He leapt over this barrier, and instantaneously found himself in the presence of two females, one of whom whispered in a hurried voice, which was full of alarm, “What has happened? what made you so long? and what meant that cry just now?”

It was Maude who thus spoke; and then her companion instantaneously demanded in a still lower voice, but which was even still more hurried and anxious, “Has aught happened to the Earl?”

“Nothing—nothing, fair lady!” replied Sir Conrad Rossel, who had no difficulty in recognising the countenance of Marion Galbraith the instant the light of the moon fell upon it, for he had often seen her riding in the Queen’s train. “The Earl is safe!—another moment, and he will be here!”

A sigh—not of sorrow—but one of those sighs which indicate a relief that the heart suddenly experiences—came forth from Marion’s lips; for need we inform the reader that the noble-minded damsel loved—yes, deeply loved the Earl whom upwards of three long years back she had helped to escape from the Castle of the Bass Rock! We may here observe that she was enveloped in a cloak of sables which was far too ample for the youthful slenderness of her exquisitely symmetrical form; and she had on a cap such as only matrons were in those times accustomed to wear. In a word, these were articles of her mother’s raiment which she had borrowed to facilitate her escape.

“You asked what meant that cry, Maude?” pursued Conrad Rossel; “and I will tell you. Retribution has overtaken a miscreant—”

“Mompesson?” ejaculated both Marion and Maude, as if they were speaking in the same breath; for his name was instantaneously suggested to them both by the remark of the Teutonic warrior.

“Yes: I mean Mompesson,” said the latter. “Within the last few minutes heaven’s vengeance fell upon him; and I deplore not having been ren-

dered heaven’s instrument! He watched you, Maude—he saw you unroll the packthread—But enough! he is no more! I hurled him down the abyss.”

“The blessed Virgin knows,” said Marion Galbraith, in a low fervid voice, “that I like not deeds of violence nor sanguinary vengeance: but in this instance—”

“In this instance,” repeated Maude emphatically, —“in this instance, dear lady, it is impossible to harbour a regret!”—and at the same time Maude’s heart bounded with a sense of relief as she thought to herself, “The dwarf’s tongue cannot now whisper prejudicially of me in the ear of Arthur Curtoys!”

The Earl of Bassentyne was at this moment making his appearance upon the rampart; and at once recognising Marion Galbraith, he sank upon his right knee—taking her hand gently, conveying it to his lips, and saying, “Fair maiden, have I your promise that this hand shall be bestowed upon me at the altar?”

Marion bent slightly down towards the kneeling Earl, as she said in a low whisper, “If your lordship’s heart can accompany the proffer of your hand, my answer is in the affirmative. But if, my lord, the image of another yet linger in that heart of yours, I will hold you to no pledge! I will fly hence that I may become a witness at the proper time on the Queen’s behalf: but—but—I will leave you unshackled—”

“Marion! my heart is free to love you!” interrupted the Earl, in a voice expressive of deep emotion; “and I swear it! Wilt thou be mine? tell me, dearest Marion—”

“My lord—Roland,” she tremulously answered, —“I will be thine!”

Again the fair hand was conveyed to the Earl’s lips; and as he rose from his kneeling posture, he said, “By yon chaste planet of the night, dear Marion! I vow that unto thee will I ever prove a faithful and affectionate husband!”

Meanwhile Sir Conrad Rossel had drawn Maude hastily aside; for with a delicate consideration he knew that there must be some little exchange of tender parlance between the Earl and the fair Marion Galbraith.

“And all has progressed well, Maude!” said Sir Conrad, rapidly sweeping his eyes around.

“As you may suppose, Sir Knight,” answered the damsel, —“or else we should not be here.”

“Yon solitary sentinel,” said the Teutonic warrior, “lounging at the end of the rampart—”

“The elder Curtoys,” answered Maude. “You see, Sir Knight, that it was with no overweening confidence I assured you the worthy man would enter into the plot, and that he would contrive, without exciting any suspicion, to be placed on duty on this line of rampart—”

“And Mistress Marion?” asked Sir Conrad, “did she manage as you had foreshadowed the project?”

“Even so, Sir Knight. Arthur Curtoys—and here a blush crossed Maude’s countenance—“again contrived to be on duty to-night, in the passage leading to Lady Galbraith’s suite of apartments—”

“I comprehend! And Mistress Marion appropriated her mother’s garb?”

“As you see, Sir Knight. Arthur Curtoys,” continued Maude, with an arch smile, “was not placed as a sentinel in that passage to bar the egress of Lady Galbraith: neither was he to peer too closely into the face of any lady, whosever she might be, coming forth from that suite of apartments. So, as her ladyship slept soundly—thanks to an opiate which I procured, and which Mistress

Marion mixed with her mother's wine—though it was with no small degree of compunction the gentle dame assented thereto——

"Well," interjected Sir Conrad, "it was for a good purpose! And so the young lady availed herself of the hour when her mother slept——"

"Yes, Sir Knight;—and taking the key of the outer room from beneath her ladyship's pillow, and putting on her ladyship's cloak and head-dress, Mistress Marion glided past Arthur Curoys—who of course cannot be held responsible for her escape?—can he, Sir Knight?"

"Not a whit of it!" interjected Rossel.

"And so Mistress Marion joined me on the rampart here, a few moments before we heard that strange cry come forth——"

"The death-cry of Mompesson!" added the Teutonic warrior; and Maude could not help recoiling for an instant at the sinister glare which his eyes shot forth as he thus spoke.

At this instant the Earl of Bassentyne and Marion Galbraith turned towards Conrad and Maude; and the eyes of all were simultaneously swept around, to assure themselves that the coast continued clear in that part of the castle, with the exception of the friendly sentinel who was lounging over the rampart at a little distance.

"Sir Conrad," hastily whispered the Earl, drawing the Teutonic Knight aside, "Marion Galbraith wishes Maude to accompany her; and the girl has agreed to go. See you any reason why it should be otherwise? 'Twill be but the delay of a few more minutes in lowering the damsel——"

"Be it as you will, my lord," replied Sir Conrad: "I can offer no objection where the delicate feelings, and perhaps the good repute, of an amiable young lady are concerned."

"Then everything is settled," said the Earl, turning towards Marion and Maude. "And it only remains to deal with yon friendly sentinel according to promise——"

"Nay, my lord!" interjected Maude; "he will not receive gold! For the elder Master Curoys is a worthy man—and he says that he cannot sell himself in services such as this. But he has something to stipulate. Ah! hither he comes to speak for himself!"

The friendly sentinel had quitted his lounging posture, and was now advancing along the rampart, as Maude had said. Hastily approaching the spot where the group was gathered, he said, "Come, come! these be unnecessary delays! I prithee use despatch! Is there anything amiss thus to detain ye?"

"Nothing," replied the Earl of Bassentyne. "Only I was just saying how I must place in your hands the guerdon promised through the medium of Maude——"

"I will not receive gold," interrupted the honest sentinel. "But if you, my Lord Earl, and your gallant companion, will have the kindness to stretch me with a severe blow upon the rampart—to bind my arms and legs—and to thrust a gag in my mouth, it would be all the better—and I should escape as free from suspicion in the long run as my boy Arthur himself in the course which was sketched out for his own special adoption."

"This business," ejaculated Conrad Rossel, "is not difficult of comprehension, and in good sooth, it strikes me, worthy Master Curoys, as being a sapient stratagem that you have thus devised. Here!—This shall lay you low!—and this shall disarm you of your battle-axe!"

Suiting the action to the word—but in a very lenient and forbearing manner, as the reader may suppose—the Teutonic warrior raised the sentinel

in his arms and laid him flat upon his back on the rampart. He then took away his weapon; and Master Curoys said in a serio-comic style, "Ah, this is really too bad, to assail and overpower an honest man suchwise! By St. Andrew! I shall cry out——"

"Not so!" interrupted Sir Conrad Rossel, as he tore off a piece of the man's jerkin and thrust it into his mouth. "Now we will tie a string over that gag to prevent you from forcing it from betwixt your lips. Ah! there is a piece of Maude's pack-thread—which if trebled or quadrupled, will suffice for the purpose! And now to bind your limbs! So! the rope which was drawn up is sundry feet too long, and it will serve for your arms and legs!"

Sir Conrad continued to suit the action to the word; and at the expiration of a couple of minutes worthy Master Curoys, lying flat on his back on the rampart, presented the veritable appearance of a sentinel who had been overpowered by foes pouncing upon him suddenly and not affording him a moment's opportunity for resistance.

"If it would not tend to spoil this strategic game of yours," hastily whispered the Earl of Bassentyne, when the work was done, "I would thrust my purse beneath your hauberk. But believe me, my worthy man, the time shall come when I may have an opportunity of displaying my gratitude for your adhesion to our scheme this night. Maude doubtless means that you are to say everything kind to your son on her behalf; and you have my promise that when the young couple go to the altar, 'tis my hand that shall bestow a goodly purse upon the bridegroom, while the hand of her who will then be Countess of Bassentyne shall give a dowry to the bride."

Curoys could not give any verbal response on account of the gag which was between his lips; but his eyes glistened in the moonlight with an intelligence that displayed his thankfulness.

"And now for our departure!" said the Earl: and the little party turned towards the spot where Maude had fastened the extremity of the rope to one of the cannon which Prince de Salsa had presented to Queen Margaret.

"I will descend first," said Conrad Rossel, "to the ledge below, in order to steady the rope and receive Mistress Marion, who will doubtless follow next?"

"Be it so," said the Earl. "Marion assures me that though dizzy be the aerial path, and slender the bridge down which she has to glide, her fortune will not fail her!"

"Nor mine either," added Maude firmly.

"God speed thee, fair one!" said Conrad Rossel; and leaping upon the rampart, he began to glide down the rope.

But scarcely had his feet touched the ledge below, when sudden screams bursting from the lips of Marion and Maude, smote his ears; and these were instantaneously followed by loud ejaculations of "Treachery! treachery! An escape! To the rescue!" loudly uttered in the stern strong voices of men.

"By St. Jude, all is lost!" ejaculated Rossel. "But the Earl shall not fight alone!"—and up the cord again he began to spring with a wondrous agility.

In a few moments he was within half-a-dozen feet of the summit of the rock once more; and he shouted out, "Make head, my lord! make head, whoever they be! I come!"

The next instant he beheld the Earl of Bassentyne, who had sprung upon the parapet, and who cried out, "Away! away! 'Tis too late! Go, warn all friends! The whole garrison is alarmed!"

"But trust to me to defend the cannon long enough that the rope shall not be cut ere you reach the ground! Away! away!"

The Earl waved his arm in a peremptory manner to assist the strong emphasis that he laid upon his vehemently uttered words; and then leaping down again upon the rampart, he disappeared from the view of the Teutonic warrior. This latter instantaneously comprehended that all was lost so far as the hoped-for flight of the females was concerned; and he likewise saw at a glance that he could accomplish more good to Queen Margaret's cause by saving himself than by remaining there to fall by the swords of the enemy.

"God help them!" he ejaculated: and down the rope he slid.

From two or three points across the court-yard several warriors of the garrison were rushing; and the Earl of Bassentyne, having sprung down from the parapet, said hastily to Marion and Maude, "Throw yourselves over the cannon—conceal the rope that he may make good his escape! 'Tis the Queen's last and only chance!"

"May all blessed saints guard thee, gallant Roland!" exclaimed Marion fervently, as she hastened to do his bidding,—Maude following the example of the heroic damsel.

The next instant the Earl of Bassentyne's sword smote against the weapons of half-a-dozen assailants: but scarcely had the eye time to wink thrice ere three of them were stretched bleeding at his feet. The survivors pressed him close: but soon another fell—other soldiers came rushing on—and yet it was as if Roland fought from the midst of a charmed circle! Another and another bit the dust—and it was with an increased desperation that he fought! No cry, no sound came from the lips of Marion or of Maude: but yet it was with a terrible suspense and with an anguished terror that they beheld the conflict. Minutes were however passing—yes, whole minutes,—and the valiant nobleman continued to hold his assailants at bay as if he were armed with the strength of a thousand! His heart was exultant, for he knew that by this time Conrad Rossel's escape must have been secured! Still he relaxed not the vigour of his arm, nor the fierceness of the blows which hailed upon the soldiers of the garrison. At length his hitherto redoubtable weapon snapped in twain; and tossing the fragment from his hand, he said with a noble dignity, "Fortune has turned against me! I surrender!"

"Bind him! secure him fast—the traitor!" cried the King, who at this moment appeared upon the scene of strife. "What! is it possible? Lady Galbraith! No, no! by St. Andrew! 'tis the fair Marion herself!" he added, as the young maiden rose quickly from off the cannon to assure herself with a rapid glance that her lover had not been wounded in the fray. "And Maude too!" cried David. "Away with them all three to separate dungeons—and let them be kept apart!"

"Tyrant!" said the Earl, in a stern voice; "you triumph now!—but truth and justice shall yet come uppermost!"

The monarch made no reply; and the guards hurried off their three prisoners in as many different directions.

CHAPTER LXXXVL

THE SYNOD.

THE incident which we have just related, was naturally regarded by the King as most favourable to his own cause. He had in reality but little difficulty

in comprehending that the Earl of Bassentyne's real object was to get away Marion Galbraith in order that she might be forthcoming to appear as a witness in Queen Margaret's favour: but it suited the unprincipled Monarch's policy to give a different and far more important colouring to the transaction. With avidity he seized upon it as a new weapon which circumstances had placed in his hand. He therefore at once proclaimed that it was a conspiracy to carry off the Queen herself! He affected to fly into the most violent rage—to denounce the Earl of Bassentyne as Margaret's paramour—and to deplore the disgrace and dishonour which he had sustained by the conduct of his wife. He even went so far as to speak of the love that he had borne for Margaret, and of the poignant grief which he now experienced on discovering her infidelity. He ordered the Lord Chamberlain to redouble his vigilance in keeping the Queen in custody; and he commanded that the three other prisoners—the Earl, Marion, and Maude—should be strictly kept separate and prevented from communicating with each other or with the Queen. Lady Galbraith affected to intercede on behalf of her daughter: but privately there was a very good understanding betwixt herself and the King—and it was therefore a hypocritical tear which she shed when he proved to be inexorable and refused to liberate Marion from the strict prisonage in which she was held.

Whether any suspicion was excited or not in reference to the complicity of Arthur Curtoys and his father, we are unable to state: but it is a matter of very little consequence, inasmuch as their respective tales were treated as if they were entirely worthy of credence,—Arthur Curtoys declaring that he had thought it was Lady Galbraith who was passing when really it was her daughter Mistress Marion—and his father averring that when pacing the rampart, he was suddenly pounced upon and overpowered by the Earl of Bassentyne and a strange knight who had subsequently escaped. The corpse of Mompesson was found, horribly shattered and mangled, at the foot of the rock; and the remains were ordered to be interred within the precincts of the castle, the King speaking of the dwarf as one who had evidently lost his life in endeavouring, with a loyal and trusty spirit, to espy the movements of those daring and treasonable individuals who had sought to scale the fortress in the night-time.

Queen Margaret had throughout been in entire ignorance of the measures which were devised by the Earl of Bassentyne and Sir Conrad Rossel to get Marion Galbraith out of the castle. Maude had been interdicted from farther personal service towards her royal mistress from the very moment when the latter was first declared a captive; and thus the Queen had remained uninformed of the projects which had been concerted in the interest of her cause. Now, when those projects had utterly failed, she was told by the Lord Chamberlain that a grand conspiracy for carrying her off had been discovered—that the castle had been invaded by several armed men—it was impossible to say how many—that the ringleader Roland of Bassentyne had been captured—that Marion Galbraith and Maude had proved to be most treacherously implicated in the design—and that they also were in custody. The Lord Chamberlain furthermore dropped a hint to the effect that the conspirators must evidently have been in league with the Queen herself, as their object was assuredly to carry her off; and it was scarcely to be believed that they could have harboured such a purpose unless it were previously sanctioned by her. The Queen indignantly repelled the imputation, and insisted upon having an inter-

view with the King. The Lord Chamberlain replied that his orders were peremptory—that he was to treat her as a prisoner accused of high treason—and that he was by no means to become the bearer of any letter or message to his Majesty. Margaret commanded and implored—she issued her mandates with all the dignity of a queen, and melted into entreaties with all the passionate lamentations of a woman: but the Lord Chamberlain was inexorable. The sycophant who but a few days or even a few hours previous, would have kissed the very hem of her garment, was now ranged completely on the King's side; for he saw that this was the stronger one, and that Margaret's star was rapidly waning.

The Queen's fortitude began to desert her. She perceived on the part of her royal husband a settled determination to accomplish her ruin; and she dreaded lest a combination of circumstances had been only too faithfully aiding his dark project. As she thought of all the *past*, she knew full well that if once she were completely in his power he would show her no mercy:—he had so much to avenge! But was it possible that the Scottish people would suffer her to be crushed? Might she not appeal to the chivalrous spirit of the nation and the age?—and would not myriads of champions rush forward to espouse the cause of an innocent, persecuted Queen? Oh, to communicate without delay with her chivalrous brother the Lord of Liddesdale, and with her old friend the Earl of Caithness—the nobleman who had brought her up from her infancy! Oh, to communicate likewise with her uncle the Lord Abbot of Melrose, who was powerful as a temporal baron as well as a spiritual peer! But no!—Margaret found herself a prisoner indeed. The ladies-in-waiting whom she could have most relied upon—the maids of honour in whom she could have trusted—the menial dependants who would have laid down their lives to serve her, were now separated from their royal mistress; and Lady Galbraith's own tirewomen were appointed to attend upon the Queen. These females had been made to understand that their own interest lay in a particular direction; and consequently they were not at all likely to serve the falling Margaret. Moreover, guards who could be relied upon were stationed in all the passages and corridors communicating with Margaret's suite of apartments; and she was so completely a captive that there was not a soul who now approached her person that would bear missive or message for her,—no one who would yield either to threat or entreaty, to mandate or bribe, to render her the slightest service that was contrary to the stringent orders issued by the King!

Thus, all in a moment, the sceptre had seemed to fall from Margaret's hand and the diadem from off her brow: she had sunk down from the position of a Queen to that of a captive. And far worse! she was branded with dishonour—attainted and stigmatised—attacked in the very purity of her name as a wife—accused of that licentious conduct which amounted to high treason when practised towards a king. Yes!—and therefore she saw that her very life would be imperilled—and that if she were pronounced guilty, it would be at the mercy of that husband who was now standing forward as her bitterest persecutor!

Some days passed, and the prelates who had been summoned to form the Synod for the trial of the Queen, arrived at Urquhart Castle. First came the mitred Abbot of St. Monance—an aged man, but worldly-minded, and ready to worship whatsoever star might at the moment be in the ascendant. The next who arrived was the Abbot of St. John's Priory at Dalkeith; and he was followed at an interval of but a few hours by the Abbot of St. Mary's at

Dryburgh. No time was now lost: the great banqueting-hall was fitted up as a tribunal, and Urquhart Castle was about to become the theatre of scenes as important as those which upwards of three years previously had taken place at Dumbarton.

It was about the hour of noon when the Lord Chamberlain repaired to the Queen's suite of apartments; and with an obeisance—for he was still perfectly respectful in his manner, from the mere force of habit on the part of a courtier who loved Royalty in any shape—he said, "May it please your Highness to follow me into the judgment-hall?"

"The judgment-hall?" ejaculated Margaret, drawing herself up with the loftiest dignity, as she experienced a sudden return of the fortitude which had almost deserted her. "Dare you tell your Queen, my lord, that there are any personages amongst her subjects who will venture to set themselves up as her judges?"

"I beg to submit to your Majesty," replied the Lord Chamberlain, "that the Church has power to judge even kings and queens;—and furthermore I would submit that whatsoever be the will of the King must be obeyed."

Margaret bit her lip for a moment: the ivory teeth gleamed in contrast with the vivid vermillion of that lip; and her large black eyes shot forth luminous jets of flame. But when she saw the Lord Chamberlain unquailing and unmoved by her ire, she experienced a sudden faintness at the heart—a sickening sensation, as the conviction smote her that the talisman of her power was gone.

"And what my lord," she said, in a hoarse voice,—"what, my lord, if I refuse to accompany you to this mock tribunal?"

"I am ordered to communicate to your Majesty," rejoined the Chamberlain, "that the inquiry will at once proceed in your Grace's absence."

"Ah! and then the world will say that I feared to face my accusers," exclaimed Margaret, "or confront the accusation. Now, this shall not be! I go, my lord. One moment, and I am with you!"

Margaret passed hastily into an inner room; and haughtily rejecting the proffered succour of Lady Galbraith's tirewomen, who were there, she arrayed herself in her queenly robes: she placed the diadem upon her brow, and took the sceptre in her hand. But at that very instant the thought struck her that perhaps it would be regarded as a mere mockery for her to assume those emblems of royalty, now that she had become as it were a mere crowned phantom; and she was almost inclined to lay aside the ermine, the diadem, and the sceptre. But again her mind changed: she was inspired with renewed fortitude; and rejoining the Chamberlain, she said in a dignified manner, "I am ready to confront my accusers."

And then through the passages and the corridors passed the Queen, attended only by the Lord Chamberlain and the two tirewomen,—without pages—without ladies-in-waiting—without maids of honour!—and even the Lord Chamberlain accompanied her not through respect, but as a species of superior guard or gaoler responsible for her safe custody. As she passed the sentinels who were somewhat thickly posted, they lowered their partisans or dropped the points of their swords; and these salutations were now almost the only proofs of respect whereby there still seemed to be a sort of recognition of Margaret as Scotland's Queen.

She entered the judgment-hall. But very few persons were gathered there; and those whose friendly countenances she had expected would greet her eyes, were not present. She had fancied that

she should behold the Earl of Bassentyne, Marion Galbraith, and Maude, as prisoners in the custody of guards. But no!—as she swept her looks around, she observed them not. On a platform covered with dark velvet, sat the three Abbots composing the Synod. King David occupied a throne on one side of the hall, and which was on an *estrade* somewhat lower than the judicial platform—as if it were purposely meant to imply that in the case about to be tried Royalty held itself to be less than the ecclesiastical bench of justice. A little way in front of the platform, near the centre of the hall, was placed an arm-chair, to which Margaret was conducted by the Lord Chamberlain. There was a line of guards at the lower extremity of the hall. Behind the three Abbots, were several monks and acolytes; and at a table placed in front of the platform sat a couple of clerks, with writing materials before them, to take notes of the proceedings.

There were no other persons present beyond those to whom we have alluded. There was no pomp—no ceremony in the proceedings: there was no crowded audience:—indeed there were no spectators whose only motive for being there was simple curiosity. Everything struck Margaret as being cold and gloomy, silent and sinister; and a sense of utter desolation seized upon her. There was nothing to inspire her with hope in the stern glacial looks of her judges; while in respect to the King himself, she deigned not to throw more than a passing glance upon him, for fear lest if her looks were suffered to linger upon his countenance it might be fancied that she was appealing to him for mercy.

Although from the first moment when Margaret was ordered by her husband to consider herself a captive,—from the instant, indeed, when the storm had broken over her head,—she had felt that no stone would be left unturned towards the accomplishment of her ruin,—yet she had not utterly abandoned herself to the despair of one who was irredeemably lost beyond the power of even a miracle to accomplish a deed of salvation. But now, as she took her seat in that hall where the personages were so few—where their looks were so sinister and cold—where not a friendly countenance met her eyes—and whence all but those who might be considered necessary to the proceeding were rigidly excluded,—she gave herself up for lost. What was to be her doom? Had she merely been brought thither to hear a death-sentence pronounced?—and was that sentence to be executed forthwith? Her cheeks grew deadly pale, and her heart seemed to turn to ice within her as these dread queries presented themselves to her mind. But the next instant she mentally ejaculated, “At all events I will die with fortitude!—and I shall not have the gratification of beholding me so completely humbled as to sue for mercy at his feet!”

And now, though her cheek remained very pale, and her features were rigid, and her eyes were fixed, yet there was an expression of firmness over all,—the air with which a proud female staidism armed itself amidst the execrations of martyrdom!

“Margaret of Scotland,” said the Abbot of St. Monance, who presided on the occasion, “it grieves me deeply to proclaim that you are accused of high crimes and misdemeanours towards your Sovereign and your husband, the august Monarch of this realm. The deeds wherewith you are charged have been fully made known unto myself and my holy brethren who here sit in judgment with me. Say, Margaret of Scotland, will you answer to these accusations respectively and individually?”

“What, my lord!” exclaimed the Queen, “have my accusers already been heard against me in my absence?”

“Deal not haughtily with the matter, nor with the tribunal itself,” resumed the Abbot of St. Monance. “There be circumstances which bring even kings into courts as pleaders and plaintiffs; and it is in this form that his Majesty King David has appealed unto us whom he has invoked as judges in this truly distressing case. In support of the plaints made to us by our august Sovereign, certain testimony has been advanced,—the averments of witnesses and the evidence of things.”

“Witnesses?” ejaculated Margaret. “And who hath dared to testify against me?”

“Lady Galbraith—a trusty and honourable woman,” replied the Abbot of Monance, “hath deposed to the fact that you, Margaret of Scotland, received a visit from the Earl of Bassentyne—”

“I have never denied it,” interrupted the Queen. “But Mistress Marion Galbraith—a lady as honourable and trustworthy as her mother—was present at the interview. Has she been called to state what took place?”

“She is not a witness in whom faith could be put,” answered the Abbot. “She is prejudiced as a partisan—”

“She is full of truth!” cried the Queen indignantly.

“Hah! say you so!” cried the Abbot of St. Mary’s of Dryburgh, “when we have it here in evidence that she lied readily and glibly on your behalf when she declared the Earl of Bassentyne came to woo *her* love?”

“It was a generous but imprudent attempt,” cried Margaret, “to save me in a moment when events were occurring which were full well calculated to bewilder even a more powerful intellect than that of Marion Galbraith.”

“We will not summon her,” interposed the Prior of St. John at Dalkeith: “we all hold her to be unworthy of credence—a false speaker—an unmaidenly person—a convicted conspiratrix—”

“Fie upon you, my lord!” exclaimed Margaret: “you a churchman! and to be thus uncharitable! But call the Earl of Bassentyne himself!”

“Nay, lady,” said the Abbot of St. Monance: “these subterfuges will not serve your turn. Call whom? He who is accused of being your paramour!”

“’Tis false!” exclaimed Margaret, rising up from her seat; and now the rich blood mantled upon her countenance. “’Tis false as ever was device of Satan!”

“’Tis true!” exclaimed the presiding ecclesiastic; “and all the evidence proclaims it! Listen, lady!—listen, unhappy and guilty Queen!”

“Unhappy—yes!” cried Margaret: “guilty—no, never! Shame on you!—you that profess to be the minister of truth and justice!”

“Silence, lady! silence!” interrupted the Abbot. “It is not by taunt nor insult levelled against your judges, that you will convince them of your innocence.”

“He who is seated there,”—and Margaret pointed to the King—“knows that I am innocent!”

“I know that I espoused you,” said David,—“infatuated idiot that I was! when your cheeks were yet warm from the kisses and your hand still trembling from the pressure of the Earl of Bassentyne!—when the rings of betrothal had just been exchanged, and your vow of fidelity was still vibrating in *his* ears! I know likewise that you would have gladly wedded the Earl if the King had not suddenly appeared upon the scene!”

“All this impeaches not mine honour, sire,” said Margaret, with a firm dignity; “and few will blame a woman or deem that her conduct was unnatural, if she forget how an Earl had wooed her when a



King came forward to press his suit. At all events this was my only imprudence—my only weakness; and so far from having thought too well of Roland of Bassentyne, it was that I thought too well of you, sire, to his prejudice and to my own misfortune!”

“Margaret of Scotland,” said the Abbot of St. Monance, “from your own lips has just come forth a confession of such levities and duplicities and double-dealings practised at the time when our august Monarch sought your hand, as to have rendered it most undesirable that such as you should share with him the Scottish throne.”

“Oh, but this is too much!” cried Margaret, her indignation now bordering upon frenzy; and she stamped her foot violently upon the floor. “Have I filled that throne unworthily?”

“You have disgraced it!” ejaculated the King: “you have dishonoured it!”

“‘Tis even so,” said the Abbot of St. Monance. “The lover of other days has become your paramour of the present time: he is introduced stealthily to your apartment—he throws himself at your feet—he vows unalterable devotion—he speaks of love—”

“‘Tis false! ‘tis false!” cried Margaret, in a ringing voice. “Who dares proclaim this foul untruth?”

“Know, lady, to your confusion,” rejoined the presiding Abbot, “that Lady Galbraith listened at the door of your apartment; and she heard enough—”

“Oh, she is perjured or deceived!” exclaimed Margaret. “Her own daughter was present—”

“Alas! her own daughter,” said the Abbot, “had become corrupted by you, lady; and ‘tis evident that she agreed to succour you in the progress of your guilty love. Cast off this air of defiance: it will not mend your cause—it only aggravates the guilt thereof! For if aught were wanting to stamp that guilt, is it not to be found in the fact that by some means, at present unknown, you succeeded in communicating with the Earl of Bassentyne—you agreed to fly with him—he came to fetch you away—”

“Oh! is it possible that the heaven which knows the innocence of my heart in all this,” exclaimed Margaret, “can permit your tongue to continue in the utterance of these dread calumnies? I demand that witnesses should be heard on my side! I require, in the name of justice, that those who are accused of conspiring to carry me off, may be asked to speak in vindication of themselves as well as of me!”

“What?” ejaculated the Abbot of St. Monance; “do you ask us to bring forward attainted traitors, to calumniate the King perchance—or at all events to proclaim falsehoods in your cause? Those who would conspire to effect a stealthy entrance into a peaceful fortalice, and with coward blows strike down the sentinel while dateously pacing on the wall—aye, and those too who would treacherously assassinate a harmless fellow-creature—I mean the dwarf Mompesson,—would not such as these, I ask, devise and publish the veriest tissue of falsities that ever was fabricated to help a failing cause? Margaret of Scotland, nought that you say or do can serve your purpose. The very ring the Earl placed upon your finger in token of his love, is here before us; and Stephen Cochrane confessed the other day, ere he died, that he knew full well of the love-passages betwixt yourself and that Earl. For all those circumstances alone, ought you not to continue Queen of Scotland. But now these damnable proofs of your far deeper guilts which within the last few days have come to light, leave this Synod but one duty to perform; and that is to pronounce the

dissolution of the marriage betwixt David Bruce, King of Scotland, and Margaret Logie—and it is dissolved accordingly!”

“No! no! you dare not do it!” were the words which now pealed forth in ringing accents from Margaret’s lips: “you dare not do it!”

“We dare, lady,” rejoined the presiding Abbot solemnly: “and it is done!”

“Yes—‘tis done!” cried King David, rising up from his throne; “and I discard thee, Margaret, as a worthless thing! Thou art no longer my wife! Yet will I not punish thee as thou dost deserve. I give thee thy life, which by the treason of thine infidelity thou hast forfeited! I give thee also thy gems, thy jewels, and thy gold: I will not leave thee portionless! And now depart.”

Margaret had for some moments felt as it she were in the midst of a dream that was fraught with everything unreal and improbable, preposterous and impossible, yet awe-inspiring and stupefying. But as the King went on speaking, her mind gradually awoke to a comprehension of what he was uttering; and by the time he had finished she was completely mistress of herself again.

Pale as marble—with a half-indignant, half-martyrised expression upon her features—and her large black eyes burning like fires with a sinister steadiness—she raised her right arm, exclaiming, “I protest against this iniquitous decree! I will not be thus discarded—thus disowned—thus repudiated! I call heaven to witness the assertion of mine innocence! I appeal to the throne of the King of Kings against the tyranny of this earthly Monarch who seeks to crush me under his feet! And from this Synod of base parasite priests I will forthwith appeal to the justice and goodness of the holy Pontiff! The Pope alone can pronounce the severance which shall be held binding by me!”

Having thus spoken, the discarded Queen passed forth from the judgment-hall, with more true majesty of bearing perhaps at that moment, than she had even been wont to display in the grandest periods of her prosperity. But as she now re-traversed the passages and the corridors, no partisans were lowered and no sword-points dropped to do her honour: the sentinels remained motionless—no longer were salutations paid to the discarded Queen!

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE DAGGER AND THE GOBLET.

It was the evening of the day of the memorable trial—if *trial* such a hideous mockery of justice could be denominated—that a tall handsome young man, about four-and-twenty years of age, and attired as a military page, issued forth from Urquhart Castle. He made the best of his way into the ravine behind the heights overlooking the glen; and in a few minutes he was joined by Sir Conrad Rossel.

“Have you heard the result, Sir Knight?” inquired the page hurriedly.

“Alas, yes!” replied the Teutonic warrior: “rumour has already bruited it throughout the entire neighbourhood. The villagers and the peasantry seem stricken as with a species of terror: they look as if some dread calamity had fallen upon them; for the Queen was well beloved amongst them—and now that she has fallen, they have not the means of raising a hand to help her!”

“Alas, no, Sir Knight!” rejoined Arthur Courtoys—for he the military page was. “The King is bent upon the Queen’s destruction; and though he dared not take her life, yet has he robbed her of all that she perhaps esteems more dearly—her good name, her rank, and her honours!”

"By heaven, my young friend!" ejaculated Sir Conrad, "it were impossible for this vile King and all his parasite priests to rob Margaret of her good name! No just and impartial person will believe that she was guilty! But tell me—have there been no signs of the Earl of Caithness or the Lord of Liddesdale?"

"None," replied Curtoys. "Alas! the poor Queen appeared to be utterly friendless in the hour of her greatest need! Oh, how different were the proceedings of to-day from those of Dumbarton upwards of three years ago! Then it was Queen Margaret's glorious triumph!—but to day it was the triumph of the King!"

"The continued absence of the Earl of Caithness and the Lord of Liddesdale," said Sir Conrad, "is unaccountable. It is astounding! And the messengers too, whom I sent off with such pressing letters to them, have not returned!"

"Do you suspect any treachery, Sir Knight?" asked Curtoys: "do you think your messengers could have been waylaid or pursued by the King's emissaries?"

"No—nothing of all this do I suspect," answered Sir Conrad; "because I sent off those messengers so soon after the startling incidents occurred the other day at the castle, that the King could not have had time to take any such measures as those which you have just suggested. I am bewildered what to think! I almost regret that I did not myself take horse and speed southward to warn the Queen's friends of what was occurring. But I made sure that the messengers would perform their duty; and I considered that it was my part to remain here in the neighbourhood, to watch the progress of events and hold myself in readiness for any service that I might possibly be enabled to perform in the cause of this persecuted Queen. And all the more so, inasmuch as accident had thrown you and me together, and thus enabled me to learn what was progressing inside the fortress. But tell me—have you seen the Earl of Bassentyne?"

"No, Sir Knight," replied Arthur: "the Earl is kept under securest watch and ward."

"And has there been a whisper circulated," asked Conrad, "with regard to what may perchance be the King's intent in reference to that brave Earl?"

"As yet naught is known," answered Curtoys.

"And your pretty Maude—have you succeeded in exchanging a word with her?"

"Not one, Sir Knight. The three prisoners are securely kept. Alas, poor Maude! I hope that—"

"Fear nothing, good youth!" said Conrad. "Depend upon it, the King will not push matters further than circumstances may absolutely compel him. He has got rid of the Queen—and his object is gained! But now let us abandon generalities in our discourse—"

"Yes," interjected Arthur Curtoys: "for I have intelligence of no mean importance for your ears. The Queen—"

"What?" ejaculated Conrad; "have you succeeded in communicating with her Majesty?"

"No, Sir Knight," rejoined Arthur: "she is still treated as a captive there, but with power to make certain arrangements for her departure."

"Her departure?" echoed Rossel.

"Yes her departure: for it appears that her Majesty has resolved to leave the castle with the least possible delay. She purposes to commence her journey at sunrise; and she will proceed straight to Aberdeen."

"Aberdeen?" cried Sir Conrad, in astonishment. "Does she mean to quit the kingdom?"

"Have you not heard," pursued Arthur, "that

her Majesty delivered a solemn protest against the competency of the Synod to pronounce her divorce, and that she intends to appeal to the Sovereign Pontiff?"

"Ah, I comprehend!" said Sir Conrad; "and therefore with the least possible delay will the Queen pass over to the Continent? Have you heard aught of the arrangements she may have made—the persons who are to accompany her—their number—the style in which they are to travel—"

"Nothing of all this have I heard," rejoined the page. "I have learnt but the one fact—which I have communicated; and this is that her Majesty leaves Urquhart Castle at sunrise."

"And I shall be on the way to make my obeisance and to receive whatsoever instructions she may favour me with. I will tell her that I am Prince de Salza's agent; and, Oh! if I have not been enabled to do more in her behalf, it has not been through neglect or unwillingness on my part!"

After some little more conversation, Arthur Curtoys and Sir Conrad Rossel separated,—the former returning stealthily into the castle, the latter plunging farther into the ravine, where he sought the cavern in which his steed was stalled, and where he gave way to his painful reflections upon all that had recently occurred.

Though it was now the commencement of the month of October, and the hand of autumn had tinted or seared the leaves upon the trees, yet the weather was mild and beautiful, particularly for that northern region. There was neither mist nor frost when the sun rose in the morning: but there was a healthy freshness in the air, and the dew glistened on the grass and on the wild flowers as if nature's profuse hand had sprinkled the earth with myriads of diamonds. Sir Conrad Rossel mounted his horse; and rode from the village where he had passed the night, towards the shore of Loch Ness. He concealed himself in the shade of a little grove; but not many minutes had he been there, when he beheld a small cavalcade approaching from the direction of the castle. It appeared to consist of about a dozen persons, the two sexes being pretty equally represented there; and Sir Conrad had no doubt that it was the discarded Queen with the small cortege that was now allowed her. But he waited in the grove until the cavalcade was near enough for him to recognise Margaret; and then to his mingled joy and satisfaction he discerned Marion Galbraith on her right hand and Maude upon her left. The next moment, as his eyes swept along the little procession, he perceived Arthur Curtoys and his father; so that he almost expected to see the Earl of Bassentyne likewise. But, no: the gallant Roland was not there!

Margaret was not overwhelmed with grief: on the contrary, she maintained a calm dignity; but her features were rigid—her eyes were fixed—and despite the freshness of the morning air, her face was very pale. She was somewhat plainly clad, as if she purposely studied to avoid attracting unnecessary notice.

When the royal party beheld a knight, armed from head to foot, and with plumes waving about his helmet, ride forth from the little grove, Maude at once ejaculated, "'Tis he! the brave Sir Conrad! Arthur was right when he declared that this warrior would meet us!"—and the damsel flung a tender look over her shoulder at her handsome young lover, who was riding a little way behind.

Sir Conrad Rossel inclined his plumed head almost to the saddle-bow in salutation of the unfortunate Queen; and as the royal cavalcade halted, Margaret said, "Accept the assurance of my sin-

dearest gratitude, Sir Knight, for all the interest which you have manifested in my behalf. I have learnt from a faithful page in my retinue," she continued, "whose agent you are; and believe me, I shall not fail to say everything kind concerning you to the mighty Prince de Salza, when we meet."

Sir Conrad bowed again in acknowledgment of these gracious words; and he said, "I now hold myself at the disposal of your Grace: I await the orders of your Highness. Will you, royal lady, that I ride forward to Aberdeen, to make such dispositions for your Majesty's embarkation as may be needful?"

"Thanks, Sir Knight, for this forethought," responded Margaret: "but a messenger has already sped in advance for that purpose. When the King signified to me last evening," she continued, with a certain tincture of bitterness in her tone, "that I was at liberty to choose twelve persons to accompany me, the faithful Beattie was one that I selected; and it is he who has gone onward. Doubtless you marvel, Sir Knight, to behold Mistress Marion Galbraith with me, and my equally trusty Maude?—but it was hinted from the same high quarter, that if I included them amongst my retinue, the word *my* should not be said and the doors of their prison cells would be opened. Ah! not for a single instant did I hesitate!" exclaimed Margaret, with a sudden access of enthusiasm: "for if it were not for the presence of these faithful and devoted ones, I should be unable to support the weight of calamity which has fallen on my head! But their countenance, and the soothing of a clear conscience, together with the hope that my appeal to the Sovereign Pontiff may prove successful—these sustain me!"

"And remember, royal lady," added Sir Conrad Rossel, "that your Majesty may reckon upon the interest of the Prince de Salza, who, as the chief of the highest military order connected with the Church, as well as being one of the foremost potentates of Christendom, must naturally exercise no mean influence with his Holiness the Pope."

"I have not forgotten, worthy Sir Conrad," said the Queen, "that I possess so powerful a friend in the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. I would not have him think me guilty!—Oh, no! not for worlds!"

"Gracious lady," said Sir Conrad, "it is for you to command that I forthwith set off to Marienburg, that everything may be explained with the least possible delay to his Highness Prince de Salza."

"Yes—do this, worthy Sir Conrad," ejaculated the Queen; "and Oh! I shall thank thee!"

"I will do it, royal lady," replied the Teutonic warrior. "I have some little business which will take me in a southerly direction—but when that affair is accomplished—and it will not occupy much time," he said, with a gloomy and sombre expression of countenance—"I will at once embark at Berwick or at Leith, and day and night shall my course be pursued until I reach Marienburg. The moment my foot touches the Dutch shore, will I remain fast in the saddle—sleeping not till my mission be performed!"

"A thousand thanks, Sir Knight, for this assurance!" said the Queen. "Tell your illustrious master—tell the Prince de Salza that I am innocent—that I have done naught to forfeit his esteem and respect and love!—tell him likewise that I go to Avignon to plead my cause before the Pope!"

"And fully confident am I," rejoined Sir Conrad, "that at Avignon your Majesty will either find Prince de Salza in person, awaiting to receive you—or else representatives charged to express the sympathies of his Highness towards you. And

now tell me, royal lady, are there any other commands?"

"Did you not say that you were going in a southerly direction?" inquired Margaret. "Ah, Sir Knight! if you could but ascertain what has prevented my generous friend the Earl of Caithness, and my beloved brother the Lord of Liddesdale, from flying to my succour—But, Ah! perhaps they deem me guilty?—and Oh! if this be the case, it is for you, Sir Knight, to disabuse their minds!"

"Rest assured, royal lady," ejaculated Sir Conrad, "that they entertain no such derogatory opinion concerning your Highness! There is a mystery enveloping their prolonged absence: but *that* is not the solution of it. Peradventure my messengers have been at fault; and if so, I will hasten to repair the mischief which may have been done."

"Again I thank thee, Sir Knight," said Margaret. "Tell the Earl and my brother that if I have not flown at once to them, it is because I feared they were prejudiced against me; but if they deem me innocent—as heaven grant that they may!—they will come to me at Avignon. Oh! it were happiness to find that magnanimous brother of mine, and the beloved Albertina, and the good old Earl of Caithness, coming to support me in my appeal to the Sovereign Pontiff! Tell them all this, Sir Conrad."

"I will fail not, royal lady," answered the Teutonic warrior. "Is there aught else—"

"Yes—one thing more that I might demand of thee," responded the Queen. "You have promised to call at Roslin; and Melrose is at no great distance. Present yourself to the Lord Abbot of that sacred pile, and vindicate mine innocence to him as you would do to the others of whom we have spoken!"

"Your royal mandate shall receive due attention," replied Sir Conrad. "And now, before I turn my horse's head southward, may I be bold enough to ask one question. It refers to a nobleman in whom I am deeply interested—"

"You mean the Earl of Bassentyne?" said Margaret: and she glanced with mingled uneasiness and affectionate sympathy towards Marion Galbraith. "The King of Scotland, I regret to say, acts the part of a tyrant. Oh! I would suffer uncomplainingly if others who are also innocent had not been made to suffer likewise on my behalf! The Earl of Bassentyne has been condemned without trial—sentenced without having been permitted to speak a syllable in his own defence! The King's arbitrary will has constituted the tribunal whence the decree has gone forth—"

"And that decree?" exclaimed Sir Conrad, in a tone of the most anxious inquiry. "Surely the Earl's life is not threatened?"

"No," responded Margaret: "the blessed saints be thanked! the King has not dared to go to such a length as this! He has sentenced the noble-hearted Roland to a captivity of two years in Edinburgh Castle. Ah! deeply, deeply do I deplore—"

"Let not that circumstance add to your Grace's afflictions," said Marion Galbraith, in a firm voice. "The magnanimous Roland will in no wise blame your Highness as the cause of his misfortune; and by his fortitude he will prove to the tyrant how a brave man can suffer. As for me, my love is *there*—my devotion is *here*!" and she gracefully inclined her beautiful head to the Queen.

Sir Conrad Rossel now took his leave of the royal party, which pursued its way towards the eastern coast, while he turned his horse's head in a southerly direction.

We must now shift the scene of our story to the Castle of Dalketh. It was late in the evening of

this day of which we have just been writing; and the Countess of Morton was seated alone in a handsomely furnished apartment. She was reclining upon a divan or ottoman—abandoning herself to thrilling and joyous reflections. She had received a letter from the King, telling her how the Synod had pronounced a decree of divorce; and thus the arena seemed to be fully open for the play of all the wildest ambition which the Countess cherished. Not that the King had said anything in his letter which amounted to a positive promise that he would wed her and raise her up to the throned seat whence he had discarded the unfortunate Margaret; but the wily Louisa trusted to the power which she had obtained and the influence which she wielded over the infatuated and licentious monarch. Thus, all her hopes were tinted with a roseate hue; and in imagination she already felt the diadem upon her brow and grasped the sceptre with her hand. She had heard of the death of Mompesson; and this circumstance was also a source of satisfaction to her; for she thought to herself that the only person who could have possibly proclaimed a syllable in reference to the true mode of her husband's death, had ceased to exist. Little did she suspect how in his last moments Mompesson had confessed everything, and how one of the personages to whom that confession had been made was none other than her own brother.

But while the Countess of Morton was reclining upon that divan, her thoughts taking their hue as it were from the roseate flood of lustre which the lamps poured through the elegant apartment,—a man was riding through the darkness of the night with a stern and resolute purpose. His countenance, covered with the visor of his helmet, was sombre and menacing; his lips were compressed—his soul was nerved inexorably to the object which he had in view. And through the darkness he rode steadily, steadily onward—that man with the sombre countenance and the fixed purpose in his soul!—on he went towards that castle where the handsome lady was basking in the flood of roseate lustre!

All of a sudden the Countess of Morton heard the bell at the gate ring; and then in a few moments the trampling of a steed on the pavement of the courtyard reached her ears. What could it mean? Was it another messenger from the King? If so, surely his Majesty was displaying the utmost regard and attention towards Louisa that he communicated thus frequently with her? Oh, wildly beat her heart!—joy filled her soul with ecstasy!—she was bathed as it were in a fount of rapture; for more than ever she felt assured that in a short time she should be hailed Queen of Scotland!

A page entered the room, to announce that a traveller who had just arrived at the castle, requested an immediate audience of the Countess. He was a man of knightly appearance (added the page); but he had given no name, as he had said that it was needless.

"Yes it is needless," said Louisa, "considering the quarter from which the message doubtless comes!"—for it was in the same mysterious manner that the emissaries of David had previously delivered their despatches to the Countess. "Let him be at once admitted!"

The page withdrew; and in a few minutes a warrior in complete armour was ushered into the room. The visor was over his countenance; and he waited until the door had closed behind the page ere he raised that aventail. Then he lifted it; and the Countess gave vent to an ejaculation of astonishment on beholding her brother.

"Louis! is it possible?"—and she was hastening towards him when she suddenly stopped short—she

was riveted to the spot—she became spell-bound on beholding the awfully ominous expression of that brother's countenance.

"Woman," he said, in a stern implacable tone,—
"for I will not again call you by the name of sister,—your career of infamy is drawing to an end. Too long already have you been suffered to disgrace the family from which you sprang—"

"Brother, brother!" exclaimed Louisa, with affright: "do not look thus at me! do not give vent to such dreadful language! You terrify me!"

"Wretched woman," broke in the stern implacable voice of the Teutonic warrior, "if you are susceptible of terror, you ought to shrink in dismay from the hideous phantoms which your own conscience must conjure up!"

"What mean you, Louis? what mean you?" demanded the Countess, becoming deadly pale.

"I mean that you have filled the cup of horrors and abominations to the very brim!" replied the stern voice. "All your guilt—your deep, damning, horrible guilt—is known to me!—yes, known in all the intensity of its wickedness! Detestable plotter against the happiness of a Queen! writh who unscrupulously made use of such vile instruments as the dwarf Mompesson—"

"Mompesson!" repeated the Countess in a faint voice. "But Oh! why, dear Louis—why—"

"Address not me as if I were your brother!" interrupted the inexorable knight. "I disclaim you! I loathe—I hate you! I am here to punish you!—to trample you as I would a reptile beneath my heel!—aye, and to save you also from adding other crimes to the dark catalogue of your iniquities! Yes—your hour is come, murderers of your own husband!"

A wild shriek rang forth from the lips of the wretched Countess; and then she cried, "No, no, Louis! you wrong me! you wrong me most cruelly!"

"I wrong you not, woman!" he sternly responded. "The dwarf confessed everything; and it was my hand which dealt him the punishment which he deserved. It is mine also that shall inflict condign chastisement upon thee! And in so doing it is a veritable mercy which I am showing thee: 'twill save thee, I repeat, from other crimes—though darker ones thou couldst not perpetrate! Kneel and pray, Louisa!—thy last moment is at hand!"

With another wild shriek the Countess rushed towards the door; but Sir Conrad caught her by the arm, and literally flung her mercilessly and violently across the room. Half stunned, bruised, and hurt, the wretched creature began to sob and moan, and to wring her hands in despair.

"Oh, Louis! Louis! you would not kill me—your own sister! No, no! you could not do it! Remember when we were children and played together—and you were so fond of your little flaxen-haired sister! Oh, think of those days and spare me!—spare me, dear Louis!"

But the warrior answered her not. He strode towards a table on which refreshments stood: he poured wine into a goblet—he then drew forth a phial from amidst the folds of his scarf—and the contents of this phial he emptied into that goblet.

"Woman," he said, with a voice and look that were sufficient to banish every hope—so stern was the tone, so pitiless the countenance; "take your choice!"

Thus speaking, he presented her his naked dagger with one hand, while with the other he pointed towards the poisoned goblet.

The Countess threw herself at his feet, extending her arms towards him, and her countenance upturned with an expression of frenzied anguish, as she

implored him to spare her! Nothing could be more passionate, rending, or pathetic than the appeal which the miserable woman made to her brother: but he remained pitiless—stern—implacable. There was the dagger—and there was the poisoned chalice: and she might take her choice! His manner was crushing and overwhelming: his very looks smote the wretched creature down upon the floor,—until in a half-stupified state she accepted the poisoned cup—and then all was over!

The warrior, closing his visor, descended the stairs—mounted his horse—and rode away into the darkness and silence of the night. When, some ten minutes afterwards, the handmaids of the Countess entered the apartment, as was their wont at a particular hour, they beheld their mistress stretched a corpse upon the floor.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE BLACK EARL'S FATE.

It was still an early hour in the morning, when two persons on horseback emerged from a valley belonging to the chain of Lammermuir Hills, and entered upon a beaten road which led towards the Abbey of Melrose. One was a man of tall form, fierce expression of countenance, and exceeding brightness of the black eyes: the other belonged to the gentler sex—though whether *gentle* she really were in disposition might be somewhat problematical, when it was observed that her black eyes were as full of fire, her looks as replete with defiance, and her lips as expressive of scorn as those of the individual who accompanied her. Remarkably handsome she was: but then her's was a fearful beauty—and in her traits and features there was a total absence of that feminine softness which fascinates and endears, and confirms the impression which a fine face and form may at the first glance have made upon the heart. We should add that her age was about twenty-eight; and she was apparelled in a rich travelling suit,—the caparisons and housings of her steed also indicating that she was a person of no mean distinction. Her companion also appeared in a rich travelling garb; but he had not neglected his precautions for self-defence in case of need; for he wore a corselet—a sword of great length was suspended to his waist—and a battle-axe hung to his saddle-bow. If anything were wanting to show that these were personages of rank and importance, the numerous body of followers on horseback at a little distance would have confirmed that impression;—and ignorant indeed must any one have been of the circumstances pertaining to all that district, if amongst those followers he failed to recognise the particular garb worn by the jackmen and prickers of the Black Douglas.

Yes—the personages whom we have been describing, were the Earl and Countess of Douglas. But were they journeying lovingly together?—did matrimony seem to have smoothed down the terrific rancours and hatreds which had subsisted between them when their hands were joined in marriage at Dumbarton Castle upwards of three years back?—and had the birth of a son engendered ties of affection which previously had no existence? The reader shall presently be enabled to judge for himself on these points. In the meanwhile let us proceed to observe that in the midst of the numerous retinue following the Black Earl and his Countess, a child of two years old slept in a species of litter or cradle slung over the back of a led horse. Well enveloped in velvet and fur was the sleeping boy—

and only his face was visible: but even with the eyes closed, and under the serene influences of slumber, the countenance had a certain expression irresistibly reminding the beholder alike of the father and the mother. Any one gazing upon that child, would have said that it belonged to no common race, and that the destiny of a stormy life was stamped on its very lineaments. And this impression would become all the stronger if the child were seen when awake; for then, with its large black eyes open, and its brows unnaturally large and dark for one of so tender an age, its features seemed to have caught a reflection of the stern fierceness of the father and the proud defiance which characterised the looks of the mother.

It was an old custom with the house of Douglas that the heir of that proud family should, on six successive anniversaries of its birth, be presented in the chapel of Melrose Abbey, when rich presents were bestowed upon the ecclesiastical establishment, and either the Abbot or Sub-Prior certified on each occasion that it was the same child that had been there presented on the previous anniversary. The custom arose from the extreme jealousy of the Douglas family in respect to the purity of their blood and the legitimacy of their lineage; so that this was a precaution to guard against the chance of a changeling being substituted for the rightful heir in case of the father being absent on a campaign, or being held as a prisoner elsewhere. The custom might be traced back to the first crusade, when the Earl of Douglas of that day sought the Holy Land, leaving his heir an infant in the cradle.

"This is the second time, Elvira," said the Earl of Douglas, breaking a long and moody silence, as he and the Countess emerged from the valley,— "this is the second time that our boy will have been presented to the monks of Melrose."

"I know it, my lord," she answered coldly; and then she flung a look of the sternest defiance at her husband, as much as to imply that she knew full well what topic it was that he was approaching, but that she dared him therein to do his worst.

"Yes!" he proceeded, after having for a moment eyed her savagely askance, "again shall we stand together anon, before the holy fathers of Melrose. And now I ask you, Elvira, whether you will not, in their presence, pronounce the words that will be sufficient, on due representation to his Holiness the Pope, to procure a decree for the dissolution of this most wretched and inauspicious marriage?"

"Surely, my lord," she responded, with a cold firmness, "you must conjecture what my answer will be? It is *No!*"

"Beware, Elvira," ejaculated the Black Earl, his eyes flashing with rage, "how you provoke me and how you drive me to extremities! Remember that exactly one year ago—day for day and hour for hour—I warned you that if when the occasion of the anniversary returned, you refused to agree to those measures which might lead to our severance and divorce—"

"I know that you threatened horrible things," interrupted Elvira, "and I despise the menace."

"Despise it?" echoed the Earl: but quickly assuming a milder tone, he said, "Why remain deaf to the dictates of common sense? Are we happy? Can we ever be happy? Why, then, should we remain linked together? Do I not curse the day which gave me a wife whom I cannot love? and do you not hate and abhor the man whom that same day gave you as your husband? Is there aught of sympathy between us?—have our eyes ever gazed tenderly upon each other? No, never—not even when standing by the cradle of our son! Why, then, I ask, should we remain linked together?"

"I have given you an heir to your house," answered Elvira; "and I, the mother of that child, will not be ignominiously driven from the home which is as much mine as thine."

"Nay, but I offer you a fair share of my riches," exclaimed the Earl of Douglas; "and you may go forth into the world with wealth at your command. You are yet young—your affections may settle upon some one who can reciprocate them; and if freed from the trammels of marriage with me, you may hope to become the happy wife of another. I, on my side, may in like manner be left free—"

"Enough, my lord!" ejaculated Elvira, indignantly: then glancing over her shoulder towards the retinue of domestics in the rear, she said, "There is my child, my lord; and the existence of that beloved boy—yes, beloved although you are its father!—constitutes betwixt you and me a link that may not be broken."

A terrible scowl appeared upon the swarthy countenance of the Earl of Douglas as he muttered with concentrated fierceness, "A link that may not be broken? By St. Bride of Bothwell! you may not be too sure of that!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the Countess, with a sudden start; and she flung a half-dismayed look at her husband: "do you mean that you would menace the life of the little one? No, no," she added, instantaneously resuming the air of cold haughty defiance; "black though your heart be—yes, black as the gulf of pandemonium itself!—yet you would not dare to perpetrate such a crime as that!"

"Elvira," said the Earl, moving his horse close alongside of the one which she herself bestrode, and fixing his eyes with the most savage fierceness upon her countenance,—"Elvira, did you ere now hear me bid you not drive me to extremities? You comprehend what I mean:—therefore be wise, and speak presently the words which, if taken down by those holy friars, will constitute the ground-work for our divorce. Be wise, I say: or by St. Bride! you will yet rue the day when you dared fly in the face of a Douglas, even though that Douglas be your own husband!"

"Monster!" exclaimed the Countess: "miscreant! demon! Are you a man? or are you not verily a fiend in human shape? Murderer of your uncle, the old Knight of Liddesdale! would you become the assassin of your own child?"

An ungovernable rage seized upon the Black Earl at this moment: he was exasperated to a perfect pitch of frenzy; and he dealt Elvira a buffet upon the cheek which nearly smote her from her horse. But quick as the eye can wink, her whip, thin and supple, flashed as it were across her husband's face, and a long wheal was left imprinted there. Maddened with the stinging pain, the Black Earl drew his sword from the sheath: in a moment did it gleam in the rays of the morning sun—and in another instant would it have cut the Countess down, when with a loud ejaculation a third person appeared upon the scene.

The incidents we have been relating, occurred just by a sharp angle which the road made with a thick row of trees on either side; and round that angle a horseman all in a moment burst upon the view of the disputing husband and wife.

"Hold, coward! What! strike a woman?" ejaculated this horseman. "By my faith, 'tis the Earl of Douglas!"

"The Lord of Liddesdale!" cried the Earl; and thus was the recognition instantaneously mutual.

For a few instants the Black Earl and the gallant Fleming surveyed each other with angry looks; and then the latter, doffing his plumed cap to the Countess, said, "Though it ill beseems any one to inter-

fere betwixt husband and wife, yet the present circumstances are so extraordinary—"

"Who dares talk of interference?" thundered the Black Earl. "If your words, my lord, applied, to me—"

"Lady," said our gallant hero, "if my escort may for a while serve you, so that you may escape from the threatened brutality of him who is not worthy to be your husband, command my attendance and that of my retainers."

As he thus spoke, some half-dozen armed men, at the head of whom was Malcolm Seton, came careering upon their steeds round the angle where their master had preceded them; and almost at the same instant the retainers of the Black Earl, with the child in the midst, came up from the other direction. And now on either side were hands laid threateningly upon swords; and while the Black Douglas already held his brand unsheathed, the young Lord of Liddesdale had half drawn his own weapon.

"By St. Bride!" exclaimed the Douglas, "'tis well met—and the lists of Roslin shall now be avenged! Make your own men keep back! As for mine, they will not budge an inch when once my mandate has gone forth that they be still!"

"My lord," said our hero, "you cannot suspect that I fear to allow my weapon to cross yours on any seemly occasion. But here, in the presence of your Countess—"

"Ah! do you want provocation? has your fiery blood grown cold?" vociferated the Earl. "Stand upon your guard—or by St. Bride! I will cut thee down!"

"Refuse not the challenge, brave Lord of Liddesdale!" exclaimed Elvira; "and stand on no punctilio because of my presence!"

"Yet one word more, lady!" cried Fleming. "I warn thee that if I draw my weapon in this combat—"

"Braggart!" ejaculated the Black Earl: "dost dare presume on the success which accident gave thee at Roslin?"

Thus speaking, the Earl spurred his powerful steed forward, and aimed a tremendous blow at the Lord of Liddesdale's head; for after the warning previously given, it was now fair and competent for him to make this onslaught. Instantaneously was it met. With a marvellous rapidity did Fleming wield his own trenchant brand; and yet he acted only on the defensive,—at the same time exclaiming, "Noble lady, behold! I am loath to shed your husband's blood before your sight!"

"Sacrifice not your safety to your magnanimity!" ejaculated Elvira, in whose eyes there was a strange sinister gleaming, as if she had a particular desire on which side success might result, and as if this sympathy were not on behalf of her husband.

"If any partisan of the Black Earl," cried the warlike Malcolm Seton, "would think fit to exchange blows with me—"

"Be silent, Seton—and stand back!" exclaimed our hero. "You have no quarrel with the men of Douglas!"

"No!" cried Elvira; "nor have the men of Douglas a quarrel now with those of Liddesdale!"

"I am content that it shall lie betwixt us two!" thundered the Black Earl. "Here, upon this spot, let all old rancours be washed out in the heart's blood of one of us!"

While thus speaking in a series of fierce verbal jerkings, rather than in a continuous strain, the Black Douglas made his blows hail around the person of Fleming—clashing upon our young hero's sword, or clattering against his corslet—but injuring him not. At length, having maintained the defen-

ere until his life was every moment threatened, the magnanimous Lord of Liddesdale thought of his beautiful wife Albertina and his own well-beloved boy; and he felt that for their sakes he must live!—on their account he must disregard the punctilios which had hitherto restrained his arm! A sudden fire flashed from the dark eyes which were previously calm with only their wonted animation, and he exclaimed, "Beware, my lord! beware how you provoke me further!"

"Peace to thine idle threats!" shouted the Earl disdainfully.

"No! not idle! See!" and Fleming's sword, making a terrific sweep, inflicted a ghastly wound on the Earl's left arm.

"Ah, by St. Bride!" yelled the infuriate nobleman, "thy doom is sealed! Offer up thy last prayer!"

"And thine!" cried the Lord of Liddesdale, his voice ringing with a clarion-like clearness in contrast with the hoarse enraged tone in which the vociferations of the Douglas were sent forth.

Then for a few moments the two weapons played about each other like lambent tongues of flame, so brightly did they gleam in the morning sun. The eye could not follow the ins and outs of those cuttings and piercings—those sweepings and levellings—those wardings and attackings! But it was all soon over; for having failed in one last tremendous effort to annihilate his opponent, the Earl of Douglas laid himself open to a most fatal attack—and, mortally wounded, he fell heavily from his horse.

Down sprang the victorious Lord of Liddesdale from his steed—across the prostrate Earl he strode—and for a few instants there was the profound silence of suspense as he bent down with his face almost close to the Black Earl's lips to see whether he still breathed. But motionless lay the Douglas; and Fleming, turning with a mournful countenance towards Elvira, said, "Lady, before heaven and before all these witnesses, do I proclaim my regret that I should have robbed thee of a husband!"

"Vengeance for the Douglas!" shouted all the followers of the deceased nobleman.

In a moment twenty swords flashed from their sheaths, and twenty jackmen were about to urge their steeds forward to attack the Lord of Liddesdale. Yet not unprepared was he for the incident; he at once sprang upon his steed—while his followers made their own drawn swords flash in the sunlight. For an instant a tremendous conflict seemed imminent; but all in a moment Elvira dashed in upon her own steed betwixt the two bands, and raising her arm imperiously as she looked towards her partisans, she exclaimed, "Peace! Sheathe your weapons! To me is your obedience now due! Your infant lord is in the midst of you—and it is as his mother that I sway all the authority of the house of Douglas!"

So imposing was the air of the Countess—so commanding her tone—and in her eyes was there something so like the fierce overawing spirit of him whom they had been wont to obey and who now lay a corpse at their feet—that the Borderers unhesitatingly and as if by one consent obeyed the mandate. They sheathed their swords and shrank back.

"My Lord of Liddesdale," pursued the Countess of Douglas, "I hold you guiltless of the premeditated and willing death of my husband. In self-defence you slew him. It was as if he wantonly and wilfully rushed upon the point of your sword. Thou art a brave warrior—and as magnanimous as thou art brave! I bid thee farewell, my lord. Pursue thy way—and henceforth let there be peace between thy people and mine!"

Boston and the Liddesdale men had sheathed their

weapons at the same time that the Borderers returned their swords to the scabbards; and now again bowing his plumed head to the lady, our hero continued his route at the head of his followers.

Slowly he passed on his way, which lay towards Roslin Castle; and he was reflecting mournfully upon the necessity which had compelled him to take a human life, when he beheld a warrior in complete armour advancing towards him at a quick pace. He had his visor closed; but when he approached near enough to obtain a sufficient view of our hero, he raised that aventail, exclaiming with mingled joy and surprise, "By St. Jude! 'tis the Lord of Liddesdale himself!"

"Yes—I am the Lord of Liddesdale, Sir Knight," answered Fleming, who judged by the warrior's golden spurs that such was the rank he bore in the sphere of chivalry.

"By what lucky chance do we thus meet?" exclaimed the warrior. "Have you seen my messengers?"

"Messengers?" echoed Fleming, with a look of amazement. "No! I have seen no messengers!"

"But when did you leave Hermitage Castle?" inquired the warrior quickly.

"Some few days back," replied Fleming. "I went on a visit to the worthy Abbot Benedictus—"

"Ah! and I am also bound to Melrose!" ejaculated the warrior. "Thence I should have retraced my way towards Roslin—for in good sooth I diverged somewhat last night," he added with a sombre look, "and for many wearisome hours have been compelled to rest in a poor shieling rather than flounder uselessly about those Lammermuir Hills."

"But who are you, Sir Knight?" inquired our hero impetuously.

"Tell me of the Earl of Caithness?" exclaimed the warrior, without heeding the question. "Is he at Roslin?"

"Yes—at Roslin," rejoined Fleming. "I am now on my way to visit his lordship. But—"

"And you have heard nothing," asked the warrior; "no rumour of a terrific evil has as yet reached your years? But no! how could it? Everything was managed with so much secrecy and so much despatch—"

"Keep me not in suspense, Sir Knight!" exclaimed the Lord of Liddesdale. "I see that something terrible has occurred! Tell me, I conjure you, who are you? and how came you to know me?"

"I saw you at Dumbarton, my lord, on a memorable occasion—upwards of three years ago," rejoined the warrior; "and, alas! that I should now be compelled to distress your mind—"

"Who are you, Sir Knight? who are you?" demanded Fleming, with feverish impatience.

"I belong to the military hierarchy of Teutonic warriors," was the response; "and I am called Sir Conrad Rosel."

"I remember that I heard the illustrious Prince de Salza mention your name," said Fleming. "But the tidings, Sir Knight—the tidings you have to impart? Be speedy—be speedy, I implore! Surely that great and good man cannot have passed prematurely away from the world?"

"No, my lord!—no!" interjected Sir Conrad; "it is not of him that I have to speak! It is—it is—of—your sister—the unfortunate Margaret!"

"Ah! unfortunate!" exclaimed Fleming anxiously. "Blessed saints! what mean you?"

"Alas! I mean, my lord," rejoined the Teutonic warrior, in mournful accents, "that within the last few days, startling events have occurred with a wondrous rapidity. I mean that the day before yesterday a decree of divorce was pronounced



against your sister—and that early yesterday morning she left her palace-castle in the Highlands, to undertake a voyage, and then a long, long journey—that her final appeal may be made unto the Sovereign Pontiff himself!”

It was with a species of stupefaction that the Lord of Liddesdale listened to this astounding intelligence, every detail of which struck him as it were blow upon blow: then he burst forth into a fit of passionate indignation against the King; and when the first gust of his fury had thus expended itself, he prepared to listen with as much patient attention as he could command, to the narrative of recent events which the Teutonic warrior had to relate.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

It was exactly twenty-one days after the incidents which we have just been relating, that a young man, with garments so travel-soiled that it was scarcely possible to discern of what texture or fashion they had originally been, galloped into the superb old French city of Avignon, at the sultry hour of noon. His cheek was deadly pale: but the tremendous excitement of the pace at which he had evidently ridden, concentrated its expression, so to speak; in the unnatural fire which burnt in his eyes. As he passed through the streets, it was evident to many observers that he swayed to and fro and reeled in his saddle like a person under the influence of wine; and when at length he suddenly pulled up his steed for the purpose of making some inquiry, he fell to the ground. The by-standers hastened to raise him: at first they thought he was dead; but he presently gave signs of life; and on being conveyed to an adjacent hostelry, he was promptly attended by a chirurgeon fetched from the neighbourhood. The medical man presently pronounced him to be in a state of raging fever which must have been caused by some long-endured and very powerful excitement.

About the person of the unfortunate traveller an ample supply of gold was discovered, and also a sealed packet addressed to his Holiness the Sovereign Pontiff, Clement X, who then held his Court at Avignon, that peerless city of southern France. The packet was fastened with a silken cord, and the seal was impressed with a royal crown. Who, then, could the messenger be? He was young—remarkably handsome—and naturally of distinguished appearance: but his countenance was so haggard that it was evident he must, as the chirurgeon said, have passed through no ordinary degree of excitement.

The sealed packet was at once conveyed to Pope Clement; and it proved to be a memorial from Margaret Queen of Scotland, addressed to the Pontiff. It set out by describing the wrongs which she had sustained, the mock trial to which she had been subjected, and the sentence of divorce which had been pronounced against her. It went on to say that she had quitted Scotland—and that she was then at Rotterdam, with the intention of journeying as fast as circumstances would permit, to throw herself at the feet of the Pope to demand justice at his hands. But inasmuch as she feared lest King David might by means of speedy messengers seek to prejudice the mind of his Holiness upon the subject, Queen Margaret had considered it expedient to make every endeavour to forestall such iniquitous proceeding, if attempted, on the

part of the Scottish monarch; and hence this memorial which she now lost no time in transmitting to his Holiness—hence also the protest which she thus proclaimed against the decree of divorce pronounced by the Synod of Urquhart Castle. Furthermore, Queen Margaret prayed in this memorial that his Holiness would not ratify that decree until he should have heard her own self-exculpation; and finally that on her arrival at Avignon, he would receive her in such a manner as might become her queenly rank and royal station.

A note appended to this memorial, set forth that it would be presented to his Holiness the Pope, by Margaret's well-beloved brother, Fleming Lord of Liddesdale, who having joined her at Rotterdam, counselled her to take this immediate step towards the proclamation of her innocence and the vindication of her character. Thus, when the memorial and the note were read, it was of course surmised that the young traveller who had ridden so fast must be the Lord of Liddesdale himself; and if any doubt were entertained on the subject, it was set at rest at the expiration of about thirty-six hours, when Malcolm Seton and three or four other faithful retainers of Fleming, rode into Avignon and made inquiries for their master. Then, how great was their distress on learning that he was tossing upon a couch in a burning fever and raving in a wild delirium! But from the explanations which they gave to the chirurgeon and the host of the tavern, it was indeed but little astonishing that the Lord of Liddesdale should be plunged into such a state; for he had ridden for almost three weeks through the Netherlands and the whole length of France, from Rotterdam to Avignon, without allowing himself more than an hour's rest at very distant intervals, while his brain had been in a ferment the whole time on account of the tremendous wrongs which his well-beloved sister had sustained. His faithful followers had endeavoured to keep pace with him; and for the first two-thirds of the journey they had succeeded. But during the last week it was impossible to obtain an adequate number of relay horses: Fleming had of course taken the preference in each case; so that he had outstripped his followers and had arrived thirty-six hours before them. Physically they were as jaded and exhausted as he himself: but mentally they had suffered little in comparison,—their brains not having been subjected to the same terrific excitement as that which had produced so fearful an effect upon their gallant young master.

When all these circumstances came to the knowledge of the Pope, he expressed the deepest sympathy on behalf of the Lord of Liddesdale; and he also spoke favourably in reference to Margaret's cause, declaring his conviction that it must be a good one to have excited so much affectionate zeal and magnanimous alacrity on the part of the chivalrous-minded brother. He sent one of his own physicians to attend upon Fleming at the hostelry, together with an intimation to the landlord of the establishment that he was to make sure the invalid wanted for nothing.

Two or three days afterwards, messengers from King David of Scotland arrived at Avignon, to present to his Holiness a report of the proceedings of the Synod at Urquhart Castle. So specious and plausible was the wording of this document—so grave seemed the charges against Queen Margaret—and so respectable were the three names appended thereto (those of the Abbots of St. Monance, Dalkeith, and Dryburgh), that the Pope would have instantaneously confirmed the decree if it had not been that this document was forestalled by Margaret's own memorial. Well was it, therefore, for

the Scottish Queen that she possessed a brother who had displayed such ardent zeal and loving devotion in her cause; for the immediate result was that the Pope declared his opinion to be suspended, and that before he granted the prayer of King David for a confirmation of the decree, he must hear the verbal appeal which Queen Margaret was coming to make before the pontifical throne. But though Clement X publicly proclaimed that his judgment was suspended, yet did he by his conduct seem to prove that his sentiments inclined towards the cause of Queen Margaret; for he issued his mandate that preparations should be made for giving her a reception according to her rank, and that a suitable habitation should be fitted up for her use.

Early one morning, about a fortnight after the Lord of Liddesdale's arrival at Avignon, two horsemen, covered with dust, galloped into the city, and proceeded straight to the pontifical palace. The nature of the communication which they had brought was speedily made known; and the rumour ran like wildfire through Avignon that the high and mighty Prince de Salza, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, was about to pay a visit to his Holiness and that he was only a few hours' distance from the city. Thereupon multitudes of persons began pouring forth on the northern road by which the princely cavalcade was expected to arrive; and the inhabitants of all the streets through which that *cortège* must pass on its way to the papal palace, suspended banners or rich draperies from their balconies and windows. And then, too, many fair hands were speedily occupied in weaving garlands and festoons of flowers to be hung to their casements, or in forming beautiful bouquets to be thrown in the way of the great warrior-chief whose name was the most celebrated throughout Christendom. In a word, all Avignon was filled with the excitement of joy and enthusiastic delight at the prospect of beholding and welcoming the Teutonic hero.

At length the princely cavalcade appeared in sight; and with deafening cheers was it welcomed by the crowds that had gathered along the roadsides. Five hundred knights, clad in light travelling costumes, were headed by their illustrious Grand Master, who was sumptuously dressed in a style equally convenient for rapid journeying. No armour wore those warriors: but their mighty broadswords were at their sides—the crimson plumes waved above their brows—and the scarves of the same vivid hue were suspended over their shoulders. In immediate attendance on Prince de Salza himself, was Sir Conrad Rossel; and as he beheld the pinnacles and towers of papal Avignon in the distance, he thought within himself, "By St. Jude! enough work has been done in the last five weeks! From Scotland to Hamburg—from Hamburg to Marienburg, how quick was my journey! And now from Marienburg to Avignon, in the suite of the Prince! I would wager any odds that Queen Margaret is not yet arrived in Avignon, and that the promise I made her in Scotland will be fulfilled, when I declared that on entering this city she would find either Prince de Salza or else his representatives waiting to receive her with sympathy and with honour!"

Thus thought Conrad Rossel to himself, as the brilliant cavalcade to which he belonged continued its way amidst the admiring and enthusiastic crowds assembled on either side. Avignon was entered; and now the Grand Master of the Teutons gracefully raised his plumed cap to the fair ones whose bright eyes looked down upon his progress, and whose delicate hands showered posies on his path. For Avignon has, from the earliest times, been celebrated for the loveliness of its women; but never

did beauteous eyes beam with a more enthusiastic admiration, nor red lips wear more charming smiles, nor silvery voices give forth more musical plaudits, than on this occasion, when all were delighted to honour the entrance of the great Teutonic chieftain into their city. And thus the illustrious Prince, with his brilliant cavalcade, proceeded to the papal palace, where the Sovereign Pontiff appeared upon the steps of the portico to welcome his renowned visitor.

But scarcely had De Salza's *cortège* arrived at its destination, when a rumour reached the outskirts of the city that another splendid procession was advancing, along another road, though also on the northern side, and therefore apparently almost from the same direction as that whence the Teutonic warriors had come. Again the populace poured forth from the suburbs; and the advancing cavalcade was soon met. First came fifty French knights, all clad in armour, and with the pennons waving from the points of their lances. Then followed as many noble ladies, likewise of the French nation, and all mounted on palfreys elegantly caparisoned. Then, upon a superb steed rode a lady of marvellous beauty, and apparelled in the robes of royalty. Her immediate attendants consisted of a dozen faithful retainers, male and female; and the rear of the procession was closed by another squadron of fifty Gallic knights. The rumour quickly spread that Queen Margaret of Scotland was about to enter Avignon, and that some of the greatest nobles and bravest knights, as well as the highest-born ladies of France, had joined the cavalcade in order to express the sympathy they felt for her cause and their conviction of her innocence.

With pealing shouts was Margaret welcomed; and the colour came back to the cheeks that were pale with care and jaded with fatigue, while the fire was again lighted up in those eyes that had begun to grow dim from the same marring causes. And as the cavalcade entered Avignon, the acclaim of welcome was taken up by the multitudes in the streets, and was poured forth by the silvery voices of the fair ones in the balconies and at the casements. And bright eyes looked down, and red lips smiled charmingly at Margaret—and kerchiefs were waved, and posies were thrown by fair hands—so that the entry of the Scottish Queen into the papal city was as complete an ovation as that of Prince de Salza himself. In this manner did the cavalcade proceed, until it was met by two distinct guards of honour, each consisting of a hundred horsemen. One guard was composed of Teutonic knights, under the command of Sir Conrad Rossel, who was cordially greeted by the Queen; and the other guard was formed of the Pope's own archers. Thus grandly swollen, the cavalcade proceeded to the dwelling which had been fitted up with palatial magnificence for the reception of Margaret: thus was it that the Queen, who had quitted Scotland disowned, repudiated, and discarded, with but the poor *cortège* of a dozen faithful followers,—now in a foreign city, in the sunny South of France, experienced a reception more grand, more magnificent, and under existing circumstances more welcome, than any which in her own kingdom she had ever known, even at the time when she was at the zenith of her popularity and her power!

But from these brilliant spectacles and joyous pageantries let us turn aside, to penetrate into the chamber of the invalid. There, at the hostelry, the young Lord of Liddesdale had just awakened from a slumber which had lasted for many hours, and whence he arose so refreshed and strengthened that, as he declared to Malcolm Seton, he felt as if he had gone to sleep ill in the morning, to awake quite well at that late hour in the afternoon. For some

days past the fever had left him, and he had regained his consciousness: but he had not yet left his chamber—and his medical attendants had expressly commanded that he should be spared as much as possible all causes of excitement. Thus, not for an instant had Malcolm Seton—as prudent as he was faithful—thought of arousing his master to communicate the intelligence of Prince de Salza's arrival, nor subsequently that of the Scottish Queen herself; because these were circumstances which must be broken delicately and judiciously.

Nevertheless young Seton could not so far compose his countenance as to prevent Fleming, when awakened from that long and soothing slumber, from perceiving that there was a certain strangeness in the looks of his favourite page,—a subdued joy which experienced a difficulty in concealing itself—a fount that was on the very point of running over.

"Tell me, Malcolm—tell me," said Fleming, "what has occurred? Have you any good tidings? My uncle the Prince—for my uncle you know he is—has he arrived? Tell me—"

"My lord, compose yourself," interjected Seton: "I beseech you to be calm!"

"Enough, Malcolm! I understand you!" ejaculated our hero, a gleam of joy flashing in his eyes. "The Prince is come!—and where he is, all goes well!"

At this moment the door opened slowly, and another page peeped into the room.

"Come hither, Robert!" exclaimed Fleming. "Speak, good youth! You have tidings for me! Yes, yes—I see by your looks that you have! Out with thine intelligence! It is only suspense that kills!"

"I see 'tis needless that further precaution should be taken," said a well-known voice at the door; and the next moment Prince de Salza entered the room.

The pages withdrew; and the young Lord of Liddesdale was now embraced in the arms of his uncle Prince de Salza. For some moments Fleming sobbed with the force of his emotions, for illness had left him weak and attenuated; and then he murmured, "Alas! my dear uncle, under what circumstances do we meet here, at Avignon!—how different from those in which we parted nearly three years and a half ago in Scotland! Then, dear uncle, you had just helped to place a crown on my sister's brow—"

"And that crown has not fallen, Fleming," answered the Grand Master: "the diadem rests upon her head as firmly as ever, and she is still Scotland's Queen!"

"What mean you, dear uncle?" exclaimed Fleming; "what mean you, my princely relative?"

"I mean, Fleming," rejoined De Salza,—"I mean—But you must compose yourself—I mean, I say, that I have seen the Pope. For two hours have I been in conference with his Holiness—I have told him everything—he has listened to my representations—and his judgment is already delivered. Margaret is no more a discarded Queen!"

With a cry of joy and gratitude and wild delight Fleming threw himself at the feet of his princely uncle, whose hand he conveyed to his lips. De Salza raised him up and embraced him, saying, "Margaret's triumph is even more signal at Avignon than it was at Dumbarton. Without even compelling her to plead her cause in his presence, the Sovereign Pontiff is so convinced of her innocence, from the representations I have made to him, that he at once complimented her to the highest degree by annulling the sentence pronounced by the Synod at Urquhart Castle!"

"May all the blessed saints shower bounties on

your head, my noble and magnanimous kinsman!" exclaimed Fleming, with mingled fervour and grateful piety. "To Margaret and to me hast thou ever proved a good genius! And, Oh! the joy—the rapturous delight which Margaret will experience when she knows that she is still an honoured wife, lifted high above suspicion and reproach!"

"Fleming—dear Fleming," said Prince de Salza, "Margaret knows it already. Prepare yourself for a revelation. She is at Avignon!"

"At Avignon?" ejaculated our hero, in astonishment. "When came she?"

"Not an hour has elapsed," rejoined De Salza, "since she alighted amidst the acclaims of the populace, and attended in true queenly style, at the palatial dwelling prepared for her."

"And you have seen her?" cried Fleming quickly.

"No—not yet. I heard that she was well, but that you had been ill," continued the Prince; "and therefore I came first to you, my nephew. But by this time Margaret must have received the Sovereign-Pontiff's decree, which the Secretary of his Holiness promised me just now to forward to Margaret the instant it had been duly attested and registered."

"Oh, let me fly to my sister! let me hasten to her!" ejaculated Fleming: "let us speed together, that we who love her best may be foremost in proffering our congratulations! But, Ah! why does not she come to me?"

"I charged the trusty Sir Conrad Rossel to break gently to her the tidings of your serious illness, whereof the Pope spoke unto me; and I furthermore bade Sir Conrad assure your sister that she should presently see both myself and you."

"Thanks! a thousand thanks!" exclaimed our hero. "In everything art thou considerate, my princely kinsman! But let us away together. Do not remonstrate! Joy and happiness have inspired me with all my wonted strength!"

"In that case I urge naught against your wish," said De Salza. "Come, Fleming—come."

Malcolm Seton was quickly summoned; and by the assistance of the page Fleming's toilet was soon accomplished. Prince de Salza had come by a bye-street, and in a species of *incognito*, to the hostelry,—having only a single equerry in attendance. This equerry immediately surrendered up his steed to the Lord of Liddesdale; and in a few minutes the Prince and the young nobleman alighted at the door of the habitation which had been assigned for the use of Queen Margaret. Here they were at once struck on beholding a certain degree of confusion: persons were hurrying to and fro—and no one came forward to take their steeds, from which they now hastily sprang. Then Arthur Curtoys, catching sight of them both, rushed forward with a countenance as pale as death, and with horror depicted on every lineament. His speech was lost in the violent emotions which seized upon him; and he vainly gasped to recover it.

"In the name of heaven, tell us what has happened!" cried Fleming, suddenly smitten with a feeling which rendered him half distracted.

"I fear, my lord—I fear," faltered Arthur Curtoys, "that the sudden arrival of a paper from his Holiness—so abrupt—so unexpected—"

"The papal Bull!" ejaculated Fleming. "Go on! go on! Margaret—my sister—"

"Oh, sire!" said Conrad Rossel, at this moment stepping forward with an anguished expression of countenance; "those joyous tidings too suddenly imparted—they struck her Majesty a blow as fatal as if it had been the direst calamity itself!"

A moan burst from the lips of Prince de Salza:

But a wild cry of despair parted from the tongue of the Lord of Liddesdale.

"My sister! my sister!" he ejaculated in a rending voice: "she is dead! she is no more!"

He was rushing away like one demented, when the Grand Master, placing a hand upon his shoulder, held him back, saying in a voice half earnest, half solemn, "Fleming, it is heaven's dispensation, and we must bow to it. Calm yourself. A wild grief will avail nothing. We must be manly even in our woe."

"True, dear kinsman! true!" murmured our unhappy hero: and he proceeded slowly by the side of his princely uncle.

They ascended the great staircase, pages and lacqueys making way for them, and the sentinels of the guard of honour presenting arms to De Salza. In silence they ascended. On the landing they met two men whom by their apparel they knew to be physicians; and they saw by the looks of those practitioners that there was indeed no room for hope, but that everything was over. And thus they passed on, until having traversed an ante-room, where many of the French knights and ladies were whispering ominously and sadly in detached groups, they reached a door which stood half open: but a purple velvet curtain still barred their view. They put it aside—and they entered the chamber of death.

Yes—the chamber of death! for there upon a couch lay the inanimate form of Margaret: there lay the corpse of Scotland's Queen! Appareled in her royal robes she was, with a diadem upon her brow: and the sceptre had evidently fallen from her hand only at the moment when death had loosened the hold which her fingers had upon it. Perfectly serene was her countenance: indeed there was the appearance of a smile yet lingering upon her lips: for her heart had burst through joy, and not through grief!

By the side of the couch knelt the faithful Marion Galbraith and the equally devoted Maude, both so deeply plunged into affliction that they observed not the entrance of Prince de Salza and the Lord of Liddesdale, until they were startled by the voice of the latter as he suddenly ejaculated, "Oh, my sister! art thou gone? have I lost thee?"

At the same time a moan of distress came from the lips of the uncle of the perished one—and then that mighty Teutonic warrior, and the chivalrous young Lord of Liddesdale, and the two faithful damsels, knelt together in silent prayer by the couch whereon slept the remains of Scotland's beauteous Queen.

CONCLUSION.

THE mystery in respect to the messengers whom Sir Conrad Rosell sent off from the village near Glen Urquhart to the Earl of Caithness and the Lord of Liddesdale, was one day explained by the discovery of their bodies, together with those of their steeds, at the foot of a precipice, down which they had fallen,—having no doubt mistaken their way in the gloom of a mist.

The body of Margaret was conveyed from Avignon to Scotland, where it was entombed within the sacred walls of Melrose. The obsequies were of royal magnificence, and were attended by the greatest nobles of the realm, who with true Scottish magnanimity gathered there on the solemn occasion to express their sympathy for the lost one, and their abhorrence of the persecutions which she had endured at the hands of the King. The chief

mourners were the deceased's gallant brother, her princely uncle the Grand Master, and the Earl of Caithness; and the funeral dirge was chanted by another uncle, the Abbot of Melrose, assisted by a full choir of monks and acolytes.

At about the same time the Earl of Bessentynne was released from the captivity in which he was thus only for a few weeks held at Edinburgh Castle; and before another year was added to Time's absorbing catalogue of dates, he conducted Marion Galbraith to the altar. Long did they live—happy was their married life—and a blooming family did they rear in the practice of their own virtues: and to the very letter were fulfilled the prophetic words which the Earl spoke in the ravine near Urquhart Castle, when he said to Maude, "Go and tell Marion Galbraith that I am deeply touched by her noble conduct towards the persecuted Queen, and that I entertain the profound conviction so loyal a subject and so sincere a friend cannot fail to make a good and loving wife!"

Arthur Curtoys was taken into the service of the Lord of Liddesdale; and we need hardly inform the reader that the faithful youth conducted Maude to the altar when an adequate period of mourning for the deceased Queen had passed.

Lady Galbraith survived the Queen's death but a very short time. The King, as a reward for her treacherous complicity in his plots against Margaret, settled upon her a pension; and she accepted a matrimonial overture made to her by the Lord Chamberlain. But on the very eve of the bridal-day she was suddenly smitten with paralysis; and in less than a week she had ceased to exist.

The Earl of Caithness lived to an advanced age and dying full of honours was interred in the vaults of Roslin,—not stretched upon a stone bier, with his armour for a sable shroud, like so many members of his illustrious ancestry—but sealed up in a marble mausoleum, on which the duteous love of those whom he left behind caused a memorial of his many virtues to be inscribed. As the title and estates were not vested exclusively in male heirs, they descended to Albertina; and when she became Countess of Caithness, it was by no means difficult to procure from the Scottish monarch, Robert II, who then filled the throne, a decree bestowing the earldom on her gallant and noble husband. Thus, while still in the prime of life, our hero and heroine, as Earl and Countess of Caithness, took possession of Roslin Castle; and there they passed the greater portion of the remainder of their existence, which was a long and a happy one, and the sunlight of which was obscured only by the shade which now and then was naturally thrown by the recollection of the wrongs and premature death of the lamented Margaret.

As for King David, his conduct towards his Queen procured for him the hatred and contempt of the great mass of his subjects; and all his most powerful nobles withdrew themselves in disgust from his court. Fathers, husbands, and brothers respectively bade their daughters, wives, and sisters, abstain from appearing at any of those scenes of pleasure or of gaiety where the King was likely to be present; and feeling himself loathed and shunned by his people, he shut himself up in Edinburgh Castle, where a painful illness seized upon him. Wounded in mind and tortured in body, the miserable monarch felt that even from the tomb his injured Queen was avenged; and surviving her but three years, he surrendered up his troubled spirit, his last agonizing words being an adjuration that pardon might be granted by the haunting shade of Margaret!

Sir Conrad Rossel disappeared, to the astonishment and grief of all who knew him, a very short time after the incidents which occurred at Avignon; and many years elapsed ere it was discovered what had become of him. Then it was ascertained that he had risen to the rank of Abbot in a celebrated Rhenish monastery, which he had entered at the time of his mysterious disappearance from the world. On his deathbed he confessed that he had embraced the cowl and rosary in order to make his peace with heaven on account of the implacable sternness with which he had doomed his sister to

death: but he died serenely and tranquilly, in the fullest confidence that an ample atonement had been made.

It now only remains for us to speak of Prince de Salza; and of him we need say no more than that he lived to a good old age, extending the bounds of his dominion—ever protecting the cause of the deserving weak against the unjust strong—giving laws to sovereigns and potentates when it suited his humane and magnanimous policy so to do—and at his death leaving behind him the grandest name that was ever enrolled in the annals of Teutonic Chivalry.

THE END.

